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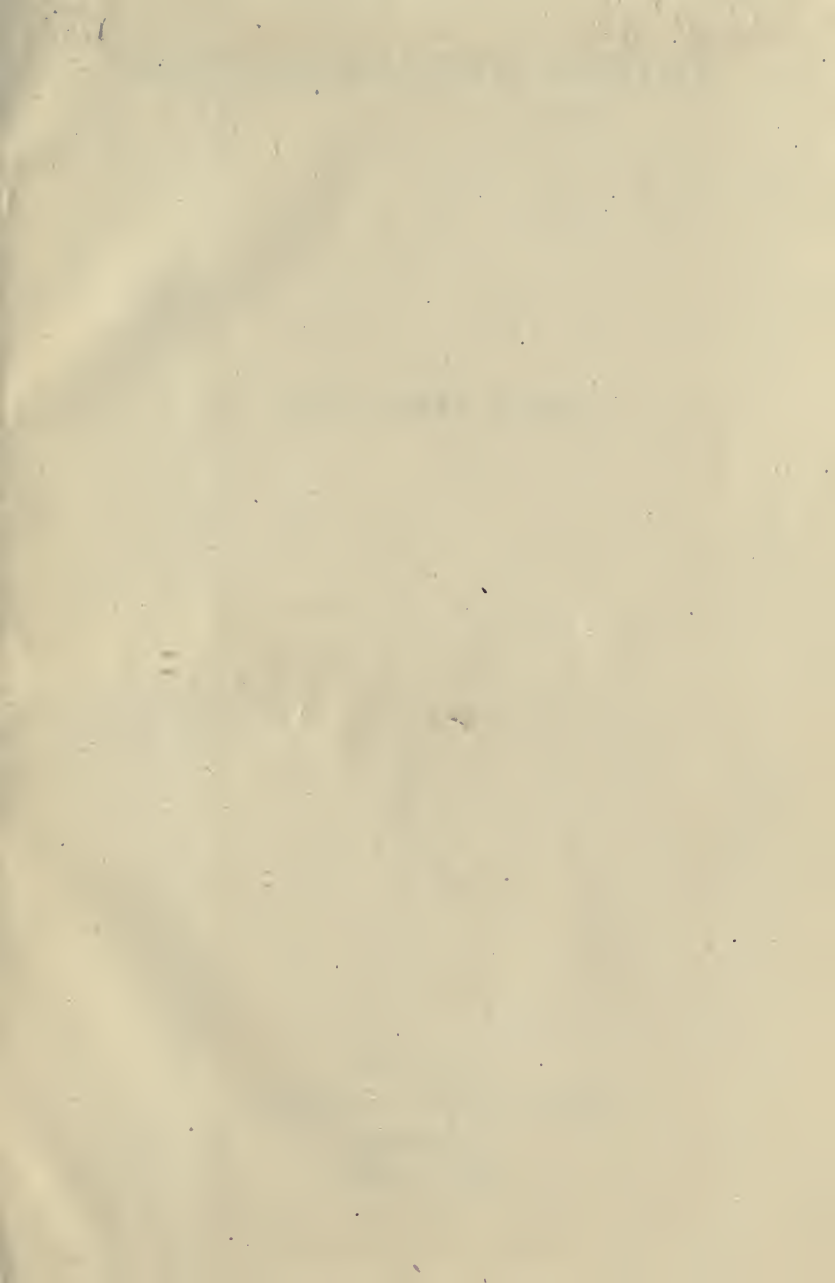
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RAVINDRANATH'S POETRY

By
DATTATRAYA MULEY



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TO
MY MOTHER
KASHI

PREFACE

This book will have succeeded in its purpose, if it can arouse in the reader, interest in the poetry of Ravindranath Tagore. To my mind, the poems of Ravindranath are more simple, easier to understand, and convey more quickly the spirit of his poetry to the reader, than all the comments lavished on them by critics. While reading this book, therefore, the reader will do well to dwell on the poems quoted in this book, and at least pay as much attention to them, as to the comments that precede and follow them.

This book grew substantially out of a thesis which I submitted for my Ph. D. The justification for its publication is an observation, by one of my examiners, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, an eminent scholar and a person who was so much in contact with Gurudev Tagore, while he (Tagore) was alive.

This is what Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji says :—

“ . . . the present thesis appeals to me as a very praiseworthy study which will help to bring an appreciation of Ravindranath to University students and to lay lovers of literature throughout India and possibly also abroad . . . ”

In the earlier part of the book, the quotations had to be taken from the original Bengali and have been rendered into English by me. Later on, as they became available, they were taken mostly from Ravindranath's own English versions. In between, at a few places, I have taken renderings given by Prof. Thompson in his book *Tagore* which is so far the only comprehensive study of the poet in English, express my grateful thanks to all those whose help I have sought.

D. M.

Ravindranath's Poetry

PART I

**His Poetry is the Poetry of Joy. There is no
Consciousness of Sin.**

There is hardly any poet whose poetry consists of such unmixed joy as that of Ravindranath. Right from the beginning when he started writing poetry as a lad of twelve, he has poured out songs which have given spiritual sustenance and delight to all those who read them. W. B. Yeats says in the introduction to Tagore's *Gitanjali*.—"These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth."

Ravindranath has passed through all the stages of development through which a rising poet passes. He has had his early youth during which he wrote poetry describing his environment, giving his impressions and observations of outward objects and things. These are touched by an inward sweetness imparted to them by the poet's spiritual attitude, and surrounded by a mystery which is the mystery of this

universe and which forms the very stuff of his later and maturer poetry.

He had his period of manhood when he experienced the most delicate passion and he has depicted this with such nicety, that the minutest twitch of the pain of love, the subtlest throbbing of the heart, does not go undetected.

And lastly when he turns from this to the maturer poetry of his life, we are virtually borne along the current of his rhythm into the heart of the mystery which is joy and truth and love itself.

The Poet a novice : his Evening songs.

From the very beginning when his poetry turned from imitation to genuineness, there is no period of his life when he falls into sheer despondency. His Evening Songs, which is his first real work as a young poet, does contain some tinge of sadness, but it is the sadness of a man groping through the dark towards light, through the faintness of early twilight towards the dawn, which he does not yet clearly see. His poet's heart is full of a vague yearning which he is not able to express. His young spirit cannot easily unburden itself into song and hence the sadness.

His first poems : Morning Songs.

But with *The Awakening of the Fountain* in the Morning Songs, his spirit awakes into light and its burden thaws into a sweet melody like the thawing of the fountain. *The Awakening of the Fountain* is a poem symbolical of the awakening of the spirit of life. From this time his spirit is never moribund; it never ceases to move and moves through his later works towards that sure ultimate goal where the spirit of man becomes one with the divine spirit.

This mystic vision of the oneness of the universe, of the unbroken continuity of the spirit of life, of its being presided

over by a divine presence which is personal as well as all embracing may be said to have had its beginning in his first revelation, in an experience which came to him in Calcutta when he was twenty one years of age. One morning Ravindranath* was standing on the verandah of his house watching the sunrise behind the trees. "While I stood watching" he writes "I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy."

All physical objects seemed to melt into this radiance. Even when they emerged distinct, they seemed to be bathed in it. The world appeared to be one sea of light with waves of light rising into it. With this experience, all gloom, all darkness, seemed to fade away not only from the world but from the poet's own soul.

In the Morning Songs all is joy and rapture. In poem after poem, the poet exults in the realization that nature is one and undying. There are the twin poems called *Anant Jiwan* (eternal life) and *Anant Maran* (eternal death) in which the poet shows how life and death are only the two phases of the eternal life and how life persists even through death. These are expressive of his triumphant faith that the universe is pulsating with eternal life and that the so called death is only a change of form and atemporary eclipse from the world of sense.

On the earth rise endless waves

Thou art its (each) separate wave

Taking one grain (of sand) after another, secretly the ocean

Builds great continents.¹

The eternal activity of life is going on unnoticed.

The poet's vision is board but it is external. Gradually it will attain depth and take on a spiritual shape. To quote from another poem;

As many years as I am alive. I have died all these years,
I am dying every moment.¹

The dying signifies only the change that is taking place every moment in the human person as everywhere else in the Universe.

Our death is endless

There is no death of this death.²

And since this change is eternal, life is eternal. The poet invites every one to this festival of great sacrifice, this participation in the game of life where we are sacrificing our selves to this death or change every moment and thus keeping life going on for ever. There is a peculiar reckless joy and abandon about these poems.

His next Collection : Pictures and songs

Although this revelation may have been dimmed after a while, the memory of it remained and the capacity to view everything as part of this eternal stream of life. The poems which succeed this experience, bear a marked stamp of it. **Pictures and Songs** consists of a series of songs and pictures of life, which though distinct and clear cut, yet palpitate with a light and life which are one with the light and life of the universe.

In the introduction to **Pictures and Songs** the poet writes :—

“I wrote my **Pictures and Songs** as if in a fit of drunkenness. It appears as if in a gust of breeze

myriads of flowers burst into full bloom. There was no sign of fruit in them.”¹

On all four sides, spring is laughing
The flower of youth has opened in my mind
Its fragrance coming out
Is floating in the woodlands.¹

So also in the following lines from *Poornimaya* (on the Night of Full Moon.)

In the limitless blue void
Where has the universe floated away ?
As though it cannot be seen.²

The poet gives a fine ideal picture of the moonlight being all pervasive and the solid earth having receded somewhere. The poet's vision is so vast that it can take in the whole universe at a glance. And this dark ball of the earth seems to have receded somewhere into the vast gleaming abyss.

In another place the author gives only a vignette of what he sees but this picture is also instinct with the suggestion that it is a portion of that vast universe of joy which was revealed to the poet in the experience of his twenty-first year.

Several women carrying water pots
Are coming along the foot path
Underneath the trees, full of gloom.³

The ‘*Tale Tale*’ used in Bengali is meant to indicate the footfall and shows the village maidens walking slowly along. The picture has a silent mystic touch about it, the maidens being an elemental part of the eternal life of the universe. They also show the poet's joy in the objects and sights of

common life. In the Evening Songs, he is more or less occupied with himself. In the Morning Songs, his spirit comes out and revels in the life of this universe. In Pictures and Songs, he sings of the beautiful sights and sounds of this earth. As his genius gradually opens out, his descriptions become more graphic and his sentiments more defined.

To the reader every poem in Pictures and Songs is a window opened up revealing sights and objects touched with an ethereal beauty, and every song is a note struck on a tuned harp which is later to produce great symphony. But Pictures and Songs is among the poet's early attempts and possesses all the weaknesses of the early works of great poets. In one of the poems *Madhyanhe* (in the afternoon) there are lines which give promise of the later development of the poet's genius.

The quiet trees and creepers, and noiselessness, with its body tired
Are (all) sleeping under the shadow of the tree.¹

The poet's imagination has given body to the abstract noiselessness which is sleeping sheer out of weariness in the afternoon. This capacity to grasp even abstract things and give them concrete shape and endow them with a sentience, bears testimony to the poet's penetrating vision. These objects affect us with their mood and we get a mild shock of delightful surprise that even the noiselessness of the afternoon should feel drowsy like us.

Pictures and Songs thus could not contain any trace of sorrow and dejection. The poems are the product of his joyful drunken youth. Each picture, each song, is a mood or

moment of eternity caught into an outline or a symphony and preserved for all time. At the same time it is contiguous with its infinite background and fills us with a suggestion of the whole. There is a wistfulness about each song, there is an elusive quality about each picture which suggests the infinite that lies behind, and from which these pictures stand out or the songs articulate themselves and attract our attention. Our spirits float and riot in this infinite, like Shelley's *Skylark* :—

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun
O'er which clouds are brightening,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

As is clear from its companion drama *Sanyasi* the poet loves life and regards retirement and running away from life as barren and perverse. The Sanyasi at first feels that salvation lies in breaking the bonds of affection. He spurns the child Vasanti who clings to him for support but when he has gone away, the vision of her haunts him. He is distraught and realizes that not in breaking worldly ties but in accepting them and selflessly fulfilling our obligations to them, does man achieve real freedom.

His next Collection: sharps ond Flats.

In his next collection, Sharps and Flats the poet says :—

I do not want to die and go out of this beautiful
mansion (the world).

I want to live among men.²

In the poem *The Forest Shade* in this collection, there is a beautiful description showing the poet's love of nature and man.

“(There is) the shade of the tree. The eye looking fixedly at the horizon where the forest and the sky touch and melt into each other; the river flowing and keeping time by its music, the people meeting and talking on the green river bank, the maiden with her loose hair, her eye seeking her lost anklet in the shade of the trees, light and shade playing in the foliage and children sporting underneath the trees,”—this and many other scenes are tenderly depicted.

In another poem *On the Shore of the Ocean* (sindhuteere) there is a line :—

a hundred decades sit here and look at your face.¹

which shows how amid all his enjoyment of the beauty of nature and the sweetness of life, the tendency of looking at objects as parts of the infinite life is all the time there. This gives his descriptions a peculiar touch and makes them things of wonder and beauty and joy. Concrete objects, abstract objects, are presented in a new light and given a personality and significance which is quite novel and yet more real than the so called real things. The ocean through ages has been there and a hundred ages sit and look at you from it.

Manasi: his next group of poems.

Gradually love enters his heart and in Sharps and Flats, and Manasi which succeeds Sharps and Flats we have some extremely beautiful love poetry. In ‘*Tauvan Swapna*’ (dream of youth) the poet gives vent to his sentiment in the following manner.

The dream of youth has as if suffused the whole sky. My trembling heart sends out its waves, like the concentrated throbbing of a

thousand forlorn hearts. When I am in sleep, somebody seems to come and sit near me. As soon as I awake the presence is gone.¹

and again :—

why am I looking on the void, lifting my eye? As if the eye of some *Urvasi* is gazing from the midst of the sky.²

The emotional side of his nature is now growing and it gives to the point in the sky where his eye is fixed the shape of the eye of the heavenly damsel (*Urvasi*) gazing at him. The whole concept is beautiful and once again gives evidence of his power of giving personality to abstract objects.

The poems in *Sharps and Flats* are devoted to the themes of beauty, the beauty of human person and the beauty around. But however graphically this beauty is described there is a suggestion in all these descriptions which makes this beauty not circumscribed and limited but the head and manifest image of something deeper and very much more extensive. Such appreciation of beauty as we find in *Sharps and Flats* can only come to a person who has come into full manhood. It is the poetry of love but the stress is still, more on objective beauty than on those subtle involutions of feeling of which only a maturer mind is capable.

The poem on the *Breast*, the *Vivasana* (without clothes) on kissing, show desire at its strongest but at the same time they dispel the viciousness of desire by describing the breast as the 'perennial sustenance of the helpless world.' While we are attracted by the sensuousness of the vision, a larger significance is opened out before our mind. The effect of the

sensuous attraction persists but the soul is awakened to a greater significance of this beauty. At the same time, there is an under current of feeling all through, that mere physical beauty is not satisfying unless a deeper meaning is revealed through it. The last poems of this collection show that the poet is actuated by a deeper purpose and does not find satisfaction in mere idle dallying.

In the *Awhangeet*, the poet says :

In my song, shall find utterance the voice of the universe.

Men's joy and men's hope, shall throb in my heart.¹

There are also a few patriotic poems in these collections. In these the poet wants his country to raise her head and not remain humbled in the dust. The appeal here is to the spirit of man, which should not feel helpless but find its strength by espousing the cause of all men.

There is a poem in *Sharps and Flats* which shows that the young poet did not only write poetry on beautiful subjects and remain in his poet's world. The poem is entitled *Kangalins* (A pauper woman). One stanza is as follows :—

So many flutes, such heaps of laughter

So much your jewelled clothing.

If thou art our Mother

Why is mine garment so dirty ?²

The beggar woman addresses the question to the goddess Durga whose image is made in the richest possible manner and who is so universally worshipped in Bengal as the divine Mother and in whose honour there is so much of festivity, laughter and rejoicing.

“Thou are so richly dressed. If thou call'st thyself our mother, why are my (thy child's) clothes so worn out and dirty?” At one stroke Ravindranath has exposed the hollowness of all our conventional codes of religion and morality. At the question put, the goddess who has been so much deified and on whom so much of misguided ardour and devotion have been lavished by those blinded by conventional religion, is at once reduced to a mere doll and her worship is shown as foolish and even perverse. And such is the force of the lines, that we who tacitly might acquiesce in the form and convention of this worship, are at once disillusioned and feel as if we are indulging in some wasteful and criminal extravagance when such stark poverty goes unnoticed in the midst of such festivity and rejoicing.

As he grows further up in years, the poet passes from the contemplation of the objects of nature and the indulgence of his own free fancy to themes of love. For a time the effect of his early mystic experience which revealed to him that the world was one continuous ocean of joy, remains in the background. He gives himself wholeheartedly up to the pursuit of love. Once or twice he descends to the somewhat sensual or the grotesque but his love poetry generally remains free from the touch of the vulgar or the grotesque. In *Manasi* which was written at Gazipur on the banks of the Ganga when the poet wrote at leisure of afternoons, we have some very delicate love poetry. Love is depicted in all its moods. Many times it is not so much personal passion as the dramatization of love. Here sometimes he writes somewhat after the manner of Browning. The poems are monologues delineating the course of love with the greatest insight and nicety. The minutest outward

indications of love, the lowered eye lashes, the locks hanging in curls and fluttering in the breeze, the half reluctant turning of the head, the suggestion that the whole body can sense the near presence of a beloved, the mute expectancy, the twinge of pain at the coyness of the maiden who feels the presence of her lover but does not take notice of him ; all these are depicted in poem after poem with a sure and masterly touch as if nothing escaped the poet's penetrating eye. It is rather the poetry of human love than the passionate lyrical outpouring of an aching heart. But no poet could have written like this unless he drew on personal experience. In Man's rejoinder and the Woman's rejoinder (*Nareer Ukti'*) we have the finest delineation of the course of love as well as the ultimate disillusionment that supervenes. But the disillusionment does not give rise to misery and despair. The poems are only essays in the depiction of human love and more dramatic than personal. They are not necessarily the record of the author's own personal experience and do not point to any disappointment in his own soul. Nor has the poet omitted to depict pure beauty. Witness his *Urvasi* in his next collection of poems called *Chitra*, *Urvasi* is an abstract and epitome of the life and qualities of the animating, awakening, and informing spirit of the universe. The lightning flashes of *Urvasi* are extracted from all sources. She is linked to the ocean. She is linked to heaven and earth. And yet she is the pure image of beauty and joy and life. With *Urvasi* the poet reaches the height of this phase of his life and then what with the social and political upheavals of his time, his poet's vision loses sight of its objective.

The following is from *Urvashi* :—

When Evening descends on the pastures. drawing about her tired
body her golden cloth,

Thou lightest the lamp within no home

With hesitant wavering steps, with throbbing breast and downcast
look

Thou dost not go smiling to any beloved's bed,

In the hushed midnight.

Like the black-bee, honey-drunken, the infatuated wanders with
greedy heart,

Lifting chants of wild jubilation !

While thou... thou goest, with jingling anklets and waving skirts,

Restless as lightning.¹

As Prof. Thompson put it in his book on Tagore She (Urvashi) is Beauty dissociated from all human relationships; Urvashi is not merely the heavenly dancer of the Indian myth... she is the cosmic spirit of life, in the mazes of an eternal dance."

The way in which the poet has given her form shows that he is a masterly creator with a sure touch. *Urvashi* combines in itself the beauty of natural description with that of human emotion yet creates a form that is ideal and detached from all human relationship. This shows the poet's joy in beauty for its own sake.

Manasi is full of love poetry but love poetry free from all sensual touch. There is a peculiar wistfulness about it. It is like moments captured from the eternal drama of life and made imperishable by the alchemy of the poet's

art. It is also full of the realization of the futility of mere physical charm.

I hold her hands and press her to my breast.

I try to fill my arms with her loveliness, to plunder her sweet smile
with kisses, to drink her dark glances with my eyes.

Ah, but, where is it? Who can strain the blue from the sky?

I try to grasp the beauty, it eludes me, leaving only the body in my
hand.

Baffled and weary I come back.

How can the body touch the flower which only the spirit may
touch?¹

Merely to luxuriate in the contemplation of physical beauty is not enough. This beauty is finite and limited. The spirit gets clogged like a stream struggling through a waste of sand. The poet turns away from it to a devotion to the duty which his station in life enjoins on him. There are many poems in the *Manasi* dealing with this theme of duty.

The Poet moves to Sealdah: Life on a boat on the Padma Sonar Tari.

The venue of his work now changes from Gazipur to Sealdah. He comes in contact with men and things. His life is passed mostly on the Padma. The poetry of this period is collected under the title *Sonar Tari* (Golden Boat.) The poems are full of both the beauties of nature and of human personality. *Lajja* (bashfulness) is a beautiful poem. The lady in this poem has given everything away except her bashfulness. She keeps herself cowering and controlled, yet cannot help looking through the corner of her eyes.

When the wind blows and displaces her upper garment she feels a peculiar sensation. In the moonlight she sits in the window half exposed and the moonbeams come and bathe her beautiful person in their light.

Amara O Tomra (I and You) is a description by a lover of himself and his beloved. It is beautiful for its depiction of the attitude in which a lover is caught and his reserve and hesitation and awkwardness and the lady's expectancy and her silent response. All the changes of mood and movement are very finely drawn.

The Poet's vision of this Earth as our compassionate mother.

From the love of men and love of objects of nature, the poet comes to a realization of the great love and kinship between man and this earth.

In *Jane' Nahi Debo* (I shall not let you go), a man is about to go away. His wife with a heavy heart prepares his luggage. She is sorry that he is going. But when he is on the point of leaving the house his little daughter comes and says :

I shall not let you go.

The poet there upon reflects :—

The grass which is very fragile

The mother earth, container of all wealth, even she keep it tied to her breast

(and) earnestly says 'I shall not let you go'.¹

Love is here the great principle of life. Even mother Earth loves things which we look upon as most insignificant. How can we then tear ourselves away from this dear mother earth of ours and our natural bonds of affection ?

In *Khela* and *Bhandhan* and *Mukti* (play and bondage salvation respectively) the same theme is stressed again.

In *Khela* (play,) the poet calls upon man not to turn away from his play with the dust which is of this earth

An if it is dust

Let it be dust, where is the comparison of this dust ?

Do not remain sitting alone like a man old before his time.

How will you grow to be a man, if you do not play with this dust ?¹

Witness these lines from the poem *Bandhan* (Bondage)

Out of what delusion of salvation, do you want to sever the ties of
a mother's affection and kill this appetite for the nourishing milk

of your mother's breast ?²

This leaves the advocates of renunciation without a reply. Not only has the poet set the inseparable bonds between man and earth in a new light but he has also added a beauty and tenderness to this new found kinship. The poem is beautiful in conception and moving in its tenderness.

There are poems on other topics also.

In *Mukti* again the poet says :—

The great boat of this universe will go floating behind my back,
thrilling the whole sky with the song of the pilgrims. Shall I alone
keep sitting in the listlessness of salvation ?³

The poet would rather be a pilgrim on the high seas of life than sit in a dark corner like a sanyasin seeking salvation.

In *Vaishrawa Kavita* the poet traces the source of all human love to divine love.

From that stream of love which flows like an ocean stream,
they fill their pitchers and take them away to shore.

They don't give any thought to it.

He whose love treasure it is,

He sits and smiles the smile of infinite love with untold satisfaction.¹

Here is the source of all our love. Here is the ocean of God's love from which we human beings fill our pitchers and bring love into our daily lives.

The Poet Drawn into the Social and Political controversies of his day.

From the contemplation of beautiful objects and human love the poet has turned to something deeper. Along with his preoccupation with poetry, the poet has been participating in the social and political movements of his day. He was first editor of the *Bharati* and then of the *Sadhana* and has been a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He was also busy writing religious tracts and the political and social sentiments of the day are reflected in his poetry. But his poems on political and social subjects are always free from narrow sectarianism or patriotism, and are full of a larger humanity and a feeling of spiritual kinship with all men.

Jivandevata.

The enlargement and the deepening of his vision in *Sonar Tari* (Golden Boat) led him to the formulation of the doctrine of the *Jivandevata*. It is a current of spiritual life which has its core in the heart of man ; but which extends to the stars and embraces things near and distant ; and also goes into the past and the future. It may or may not be identical with the spirit of the universe but it is a vital principle embracing human life and going beyond it. It is not conditioned by the physical life of man. This new discovery brings to the poet a new access of energy. His muse might have exhausted

itself with the discovery that wordly love was an empty inanity. But the moment it reaches this point of exhaustion, it is fed by a deeper spring, the discovery of the *Jivandevata*. It flows out again replenished by this new source and his poetry becomes vital and appealing.

There follow two characteristic poems in Chitras (which comes after *Sonar Tari*) one *Antaryami* and the other *Jiwandevata*

Sitting day and night in my inmost heart, you take out from my mouth my utterance and taking my words and mixing them with your notes, you tell my story.¹

This means that when the poet narrates his story or sings his songs, it is not his power that gives them utterance but it is a power behind him. Our own voice is a part of an immanent voice and were it not for the strength that this immanent power gives us, we would be lifeless and able to speak out nothing. Further :—

O thou full of forms, taking ever new forms, thou capturest my heart :

O thou cruel, thou makest me weep, offering me frail changing love.

Many hundreds of mistakes I have made already, yet mistakes will occur again in the same way.

O Deceiver, how many times to deceive me you sing your aluring songs ?²

The meaning is that there are ever new beautiful forms to lure us away by their newness but the underlying spirit that informs ~~them~~ all is one and the same.

Like this time, filling my life,
 I have drunk acute pain.
 That wine strong like fire
 I understand thou brewest.
 Next when in such pain again
 I shall go about seeking thee¹

The poet means to say that the Jivandevata (or the underlying principle of life which unites his past with his present life) is the source of all the joy in life and the cause of the pain of love. Instead of living in the illusion that this earthly life is all in all, and suffering the pain and separation of love which is incidental to this life, and longing for objects of enjoyment, it is better to realize the continuity of the life spirit through our many lives and feel the joy of this realization that we are not what this single physical life shows us to be, but that our life goes back into the past and extends into the future and is thus unending. Then the objects which tantalize us and the things which we miss in this life and which cause us pain, will become insignificant and meaningless and the joy of this discovery that life is undying will be great. The poet calls his life spirit Jivandevata.

His next Group of Poems: Chaitali The Last Rice (Harvest,)

Follows Chaitali the Last Rice, which is harvesting the fruit that grew all these years. It is symbolical of this period. His effort has come to fruition. The harvesting has been done and the poet must betake himself to fresh fields and pastures new. Here the poet does not seem to be driven on by any new force like the jivandevata in Chitra. He is resting on his oars. The background of most of his poems is the river-scene. The poems

of the Chaitali can be roughly grouped into three classes. Some are written in a reminiscent mood, describing ancient scenes, the maidens of the Rishi's *ashram*, clad in barks and sporting and bathing in clear mountain streams. There are short pieces on *Ritusanhar* and *Meghadoot* and *Kumarsambhava* showing his discovery and appreciation of the classical sanskrit poet Kalidasa. Then there are patriotic poems. And lastly there are some which have a clearly religious tinge. In between them there are beautiful pieces of nature poetry, full of the langour and restfulness of an April day.

The poems of Chaitali are descriptive and reflective in nature while the earlier, those in *Manasi* and *Sonar Tari* and *Chitra* are somewhat more lyrical. But his lyrical and descriptive gifts mix throughout.

A wave of patriotism

The poet now again writes under the influence of the prevailing patriotic spirit of his country. The long poems in the *Kahani* (Storeis) are devoted to patriotic themes dealing with ancient Indian, Buddhist, Sikh and Maratha history.

Kalpana, his next collection.

Then follows *Kalpana*. It marks a departure from the even tenor of the life of the poet uptill now. *Kalpana* was written in the year 1900. Uptill now the poet's mind had been revelling in nature, full of peace and sweetness. This nature was co-extensive with the universe. But now this peace was shattered. Instead of appearing in the sweet engaging aspect in which nature appeared to him up till now, she (nature) revealed herself in her dreadful aspect of destruction. What the poet had prized so long and cherished as dear and lovely, was swept away by a fierce storm and nothing was left except the wreck and ruin caused by the storm. Here

was a new revelation. The poet says that perhaps he had hugged the beautiful things of life too long. He continued to cling to them though they had become effete. Though their purpose was over, he was too weak minded to cast them off. The beautiful aspects of nature continued to inspire him and fill him with joy and life for a little longer. But the time now came for him to get familiar with the fearsome aspects of life. For they were as true and as much part of life as the sweet and lovely ones. He would not discard the sweet things himself; therefore providence did it for him. He had to face this new aspect and see a meaning in it. Uptill now his spirit had a holiday. He was sitting cosily inside his house with the doors shut, lost in the contemplation of a world that was all joy and peace and beauty. But now the doors are flung open; a storm is raging outside. He must come out and face it. There is no running away from it.

In the Evening Songs there was a discontent with himself. Though it was here that as he says, he found his genius and became himself. Through the Morning Songs, Pictures and Songs, Sharps and Flats, and Manasi, he is devoted to the worship of beauty and to human love. From Sonar Tari onwards, through Chitra, he seizes on the compassion that is at the heart of the universe, the pulse that is throbbing everywhere and without which life would be crabbed, confined and ultimately without meaning. To feel this pulse of life in ourselves is to really live; and to realize it in others is to be full of love and compassion and pity. This is the very essence of the Jivandevata phase. To feel this pulse in ones physical self alone is pain, to feel this in others along with ourselves is joy, fellowship, kinship. In the following poem *Farewell to Heaven in Chitra*, the

presence of this compassion on earth and its absence is heaven, are clearly brought out.

Let nectar flow in your Heaven; but on earth the river of love, ever mingled joy and sorrow, keeping green with tears, the tiny heavens of earth.

O Apsara ! may the lustre of thine eyes never pale with love's anguish ! I bid thee farewell. Thou pinest for none, thou hast grief for none. But my beloved, if she is born on Earth in the poorest house, in a hidden cottage beneath the shade of pipals, on the outskirts of some village on a river bank, will lay up in her breast for me a store of sweetness.

O lovely One, my pale mother, distressed with sorrow, tearful-eyed
O Earth ! My heart today after many days, has burst into weeping for thee ! My eyes, dry through all the grief of parting, become tearful, and this heaven vanishes like an idle fancy, a shadow-picture. Thy blue sky, thy light, thy crowded habitations, the stretching beaches by thy sea, the white line of snow on the crest of thy blue hills, the silent sunrise among the trees, evening with bent eyes beside the empty river, with one tear drop all these have come, like reflections in a mirror.

Ever after, thou wilt sit with trembling heart, wakeful beside my head, fearful and lifting thy soft gaze upward to the gods, ever anxious lest thou shouldst lose him whom thou hast obtained !¹

The trembling heart is the essence of earthly existence. All the meaning and poetry of life for the poet is for the present in this eternal trembling, the incessant throbbing, which may mean sometimes the expectant waiting, sometimes the painful suspense, sometimes the realization that there are other hearts throbbing but unconscious of the presence of our own, whose pulse beats in tune with ours.

Urvasi the heavenly damsel, is the consummation of the pure beauty the poet has seen in the universe. She is compact of all charms of the universe; the rhythm of the waves is in her dance, the pure white of the moonlight is on her face, her skirt is the tender green grass that comes rippling upon on the earth after the first showers. Yet she is without feeling. She is inhuman. *Urvasi* may be said ideally to mark the end of that period of the poet's life, which is devoted to the worship of beauty. She is an abstract of all the beauties of this earth, she has an immortal life, yet being heavenly, she has no heart and therefore, no compassion. The pity that beats at the heart of this universe which is the poet's discovery, is not in her.

Another noteworthy poem of this time is *The Destruction of Madan* : Madan the Love-god has been destroyed by Shiva, the god of Destruction. The poet addresses the Destroyer and says :—

Ascetic, what hast thou done, burning the Fivearrowed one ?
Thou hast scattered him through the world !¹

The Love-god is not dead. He has been scattered all through the universe. He is furtively peeping through the sky. His music affects you in the murmur of the bees among the flowers. His attraction draws the river on and on to its destination. How could the universe live on asceticism ? How could it live without love ? Love is here the human aspect of the attraction that is in all things.

In Vasanta (Spring) also, the same aspect of life has been dealt with.

Therefore, from the thick bowers breaking forth today rises an exhalation,

The curious pain of the youth of lakhs of nights and days laughing and singing and tearful.¹

As his vision deepens, the poet sees a new meaning, a new life, in everything.

Kshauika : his next set of poems.

The next important collection is Kshanika. As regards its form the poet says, "But in Kshanika I first realised the beauty and the music of the colloquial speech. That gave me an extraordinary sense of joy and power." Later he goes on to say, "In Kshanika there is merely my enjoyment of the creation of forms.... There is no thought, no doctrine, no subject—simply enjoyment. I enjoyed my freedom." Kshanika means momentary. Before devoting himself to higher things the poet takes a momentary longing, lingering, look at the beautiful things of this earth.

Prof. Thompson says "Kshanika was his (poet's) favourite book. He kindled as he spoke of the gracefulness and lightness of its lyric movements.

'But Ajit Chakravarti has an excellent phrase, when he speaks of Kshanika having a spirit of mockery of his own pain. As often, intense earnestness shows itself in an apparent cynicism. The poet plays for a space, between the two great activities, that of his earlier worship of beauty, and the one, about to begin, of the worship of God.

"Coming close to the life of his time, Rabindranath had been disillusioned and saddened. Noise and brag were all around him, and growing commercialism. He wanders in a beautiful country of his imagination, playing in distant times and parts of his land."

After some pieces of poetry which are full of a wistfulness, the poet turns to the central theme which occupies his heart.

There is some revolution brewing deep down in his spirit. It is yet to come out. Meanwhile he takes a holiday. He calls it enjoyment. But it is only another name for the smile which he puts on to cover up the inner struggle.

One thing is certain. Though his vision may be dimmed for the time being, he will not lose hold of the sheet anchor.

Though there be no companion in the limitless sky, even then, O my bird,—don't close your wings, he sings

At every change of mood, a certain dimness of vision overtakes the poet. It is not dimness with regard to all that he has seen, the beauty of the earth and the tenderness and warmth of human affection. These remain as clear before the poet's vision and are ever ready at his beck and call. In fact, they continue to feed his muse which never fails to delight us. But the poet is on a new quest. He has touched the bottom of the old truth revealed to him and a new truth is about to be born. The intervening period is a period of incubation, of labour, accompanied by its attendant dullness and pain. But this is the pain of a new birth. His love poetry almost draws to its end and a new poetry is about to take birth, his religious poetry.

The Poet turning to Religious Poetry

He was now going to Bolpur to found his *Ashram* at Shantiniketan. The move was accompanied by all the ideas associated with an *Ashram*—a simple life, natural surroundings and dedication to the search for truth. He had also at this time (Bengali year 1308) become the editor of the *Bangadarshan*. He saw his motherland in all its ancient glory and in all its present humiliation.

Naivedya (Offering)

Naivedya which was written after he settled down at Bolpur falls roughly into two parts. There is first, religious poetry, followed towards the end by patriotic songs. As the founder of

the *Ashram*, he must make his obsequence to God in the spirit of the old *Rishis*. Naivedya is an offering. The collection is full of the highest religious poetry. The way to it had been prepared by *Kshanika*. Even while the new vision was rising clearly before the poet's mind., he had glimpses of it which he has enshrined in superb poetry. The following is from the *Gardener*, which mainly contains his love Poetry.

I am restless. I am athirst for far away things.

My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirt of the dim distance

O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute,

I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly, that I am bound in this spot ever more.

I am eager and wakeful, I am a stranger in a strange land.

Thy breath comes to me whispering an impossible hope.

Thy tongue is known to my heart as its very own.

O Far-to-seek, O the keen call of thy flute !

I forget, I ever forget, that I know not the way, that I have not the winged horse.

I am listless, I am a wanderer in my heart.

In the sunny haze of the languid hours, what vast vision of thine takes shape in the blue of the sky !

O Farthest end, O the keen call of thy flute !

I forget, I ever forget, that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell !

Even where the poetry is not all full of the spirit of freedom and joy, it has a beauty and a depth of vision which make it elevating. It rouses and freshens and uplifts our spirits by its own aspiring spirit. It is because of this that it never depresses us. Though the spirit may be retarded and balked for a time, its ultimate freedom is sure.

But even with the new orientation that his poetry receives, the poet is not ready to quit the world. His spirit aspires God-ward but is not willing to leave the earth.

Like the type of the wise, who soar but never roam (*Wordsworth*).

In the preface to the *Naivedya* he says:—

Salvation through renunciation is not mine.

I shall obtain the taste of salvation amidst countless bonds.

My ignorance will be burnt and fly up in the shape of salvation.

My love will bear fruit in the from of devotion.

The poet desires to live in this world with its many-fold beauty and through the intimations that he receives of the divine presence through his senses, hopes to realize God.

Ah poet, the evening draws near; your hair is turning grey.

Do you in your lovely musing hear the message of the hereafter ?

“It is evening” the poet said, “and I am listening because someone may call from the village, late though it be,

"I watch if young straying hearts meet together, and two pairs of eager eyes beg for music to break their silence and speak for them. Who is there to weave their passionate songs, if I sit on the shore of life and contemplate death and the beyond?"¹

How can the poet renounce the world and retire into a life of inaction? Who will give utterance to the mute feelings of love and hope and pain in his absence?

The Naivedya Poems.

Thereafter the poet enters upon the most important phase of his life. His gaze has turned godward and he has found the ultimate object of his seeking. Entering Bolpur and dedicating himself to the mission of his life, he first makes his offerings to Him who is the ultimate Reality—God, the Infinite. In the true spirit of his father, of the *Rishis* of ancient India dedicating themselves to a life of seeking, in the spirit of the *Upanishadas* in which their highest utterances are contained, the poet in all humility bows in salutation to that which is everywhere, which is at the heart of all things, which is in the heaven, the ocean and the earth, the supreme spirit. There is hardly anything in any poetry anywhere which approaches this in the stark simplicity of its diction or the sheer directness of its approach to the Supreme Being. The intimations of the presence of this Supreme Being came to him through his senses.

If we shut the doors on the visible world, how can we come to a realization of Him who manifests Himself through this world which is so beautiful?

If, closing the door you recite my name
By what path shall I enter your heart¹

The poet's God is not actionless and without compassion. He loves this universe and acts in it. He has not cut Himself off from all bonds, nor has He retired from action. That is why the poet says:—

“Since life is divine, whether it appears successful or a failure, it never fails. Silently, secretly, unknowingly it is working toward some divine purpose.”²

In between many times I think I am inactive
Today time has been wasted, the day is wasted.
Lord, all those moments are not (really) wasted.

.. .. .
O Thou immanent God ! secretly inside

.. .. .
Awakening the seed you raise it in the form of a blade

You blow it full-open and colour it in the form of a flower.¹

Through sense perception, through the beauty of the earth, we perceive the presence of God. Life is all one. The same current of life which runs through all nature runs through us. God dwells inside and directs our life. Nothing is lost, nothing is wasted, but things are only waiting to unfold themselves into beauty. And it is His touch that transforms them into this beauty. The Supreme Being is ever present, ever watching.

In all sorrow, in all joy, in every house
 In all minds, over all anxiety, over all effort
 As far as the eye can see, it is indeed observed,
 O companionless God, thou art sitting alone.¹

God is directing all the activities of life. He is everywhere. His presence is felt through all things. And yet He is alone, sitting and watching the play of this universe, so, why should man be depressed and feel forlorn ?

Shaw's St. Jaon says : "What is my loneliness compared to the loneliness of God ?" And being god-inspired, she is not dejected when it is pointed out to her that the big people will not support her.

Sorrow : its purpose.

But, lulled by the charm of life, we are sometimes likely to forget Him. We are likely to be so taken up with ourselves that we completely lose sight of Him. At such times sorrow serves as an instrument to tear us from our fond attachments to objects which we may come to regard as all in all. We feel the loss of these objects for a time and then our vision rests on Him whose handiwork these objects are and He seems to mock at our sorrow. Realising Him, we realise the futility of grieving for those objects which we have lost. And we smile at ourselves for having been so paltry and foolish.

Fear : want of Faith in God.

From sorrow, the poet turns to deal with fear. He is launching on a big enterprise to serve his people. It is to bring back to life the soul of his people and to educate them in the right manner. There is a foreign power ruling in the

land to whom all his doings are suspect. Naturally fear is likely to damp his spirit and the spirit of every one who launches on a bold enterprise. This is what the poet says about this fear :

That thou (God) art the support of all: is this an empty talk?

Fear is indeed want of faith in thee

O, king :¹

If we believe in the Supreme One who is the support of our life and of all this universe, how can we have fear ?

Realizing Him and believing in Him, the poet adopts this attitude :

On my head always in all manner,

I shall carry His pride (and) my humility.²

The poet's whole attitude may be summed up in this:—

Near (in this life) Thou art the shore of activity, of the river of the soul.

Far away (after this life) thou are the ocean of peace, endless.³

This vision of the Supreme one, this feeling of oneness with Him seems to have had its basis in his study of the upanishads.

The Upanishad (is).....a vehicle of illumination and not of instruction.⁵

The Isa upanishad says :

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement, in the universe of motion.⁴

Further : O Fosterer, O Sole seer, O Ordainer, O illuminating sun, O power of the Father of the creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He and I.¹

All that is in Naivadya appears to have its source in these verses of the upanishads. Only, several thousands of years after they were composed, the poet has brought back to life the truth of them again in a manner and in a language that is moving, and accessible to the most humble and illiterate. This he could not have done without making these truths living in his own person. He has recaptured the soul of this ancient wisdom and clothed it in a new form, so that it appears ever fresh, ever resplendent, ever new.

Naivadya is his first dedication to the Supreme Being. It is a conscious effort to have a vision of the Divine, to feel His presence. It conveys an illumination of the poet's soul which is primal, categorical, certain. His soul is in communion with the divine spirit. This inner salutation to the Divine spirit was necessary before he commenced his great task of starting his *Ashram* which was to be the seat of the spirit. The teacher was to work somewhat in the spirit of the parson in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*.

To them, his heart, his love, his griefs were given
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.

But though the poet's was a dedicated soul, he never lost touch with the earth. He continued to revel in the beauty of this world because 'all this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement, in the universe

of motion'¹ His poet's soul, his earlier love of nature, and the revelation that had come to him early in life that this whole universe was one continuous flow of life, made nature ever more beautiful in his eyes. Nature was now definitely instinct with a soul. It was for habitation by the Lord. The Lord had his play in it and intimations of His presence came to the poet through it. It is remarkable about Rabindranath that even when his muse reaches a religious pitch, it continues its joy in nature which in the Smarana (*Remembrance*) poems is almost pagan-like.

From Naivedya he passes on to Smarana (*Remembrance*). His beloved wife died in 1902 and the Smarana poems were written in dedication to her. How well the religious spirit is rolled up with his prevailing mood of sorrow in these poems. From now on he never strays from the path which points to the pole star—the Supreme Being. If his wife is physically no more she has become one with this Supreme spirit. The poet describes his separation from her. All the old associations while she lived become merged in a sweet remembrance. He now feels the bliss of her presence in his heart. The poems are optimistic as Browning's lines in the *Prospice*:—

O thou soul of my soul I shall clasp thee again.

But they are full of a charm, a spiritual mellifluousness. The old external relations are now over and there is a spiritual tryst. The sunset, the spring, the bower, the humming of insects and of leaves all remind him of his beloved and hours spent with her. He feels her touch in the soft touch of the breeze, her music in the humming of birds, her comforting presence in the shade of the tree. He even

imagines her sitting at the window of her dwelling in heaven, looking at him, waiting patiently for him. While she was living she used to be busy in her work. She was not so much with him. She tried to curb herself, to keep her feelings subdued, but now that she is turned into a spirit, she is always with him in his soul.

All your heart's story you did not tell, you could not tell

You kept yourself under cheek, O you Bashful

For as many days as you were here ! (on this earth).

(Now) Sitting in the lotus of my heart, beyond the ken of the world

Tell (me) the unfinished story of your life

In an utterance unhampered by language !"¹

Again :

(Thou), Whom, on the days of meeting, I have given the slip many a time

Thy separation brings that me to the empty house calling for thee again and again.²

The poet laments again:

In the same manner in which He gave me this sweet of His in the form of a beloved, He has stolen it away.³

This is the poet's jibe at the Lord, half humorous, half sarcastic, yet suggesting that since she is with Him, she is still with the poet. The beloved has been made a manifestation of the sweetness of the Lord. The Lord gave her to the poet but He stole her away. Here the poet knows the Thief of whom he expects greater compensation: that is union with the beloved in heaven, and both their presence in Him in after-life.

Again :—

From behind the stage of death, you came back again
 With the adornment of a new bride, in the wedding temple of my
 heart.

With silent foot falls. All the dullness of (your) jaded life.
 Has gone by the bath of death ! Fearless new beauty
 You have gained through the unbroken kindness of the Goddess
 (Lakshmi) of this universe.

With a smiling bright face, in the full blown light of this heart,
 Coming, you stood speechless. Through the great gate of
 Death
 From life, O beloved, you entered my soul.
 To-day no music sounds, people's rejoicing does not take place
 The string of lamps is not lighted, to-day's rejoicing and splendour
 (Are) profoundly peaceful, quiet, speech-stealing, tear-producing.¹

I have frequently not quoted from his English works, because when one reads his original poetry in Bengali, the pieces that strike one as the most beautiful are not very often those whose English translation is available. Moreover, though many of his English renderings are equally beautiful, they are sometimes adaptations where the poet has taken a certain liberty of idiom and thought.

The Smarana can be called a collection of elegiac poems containing the poet's grief on the death of his wife. But all these poems are so spiritualized that while they do not fill

us with positive earthly joy, there is a sweetness in them which borders on the enjoyable.

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought (*Shelley*).

The poet's spiritual outlook on life makes him take such a view of the whole calamity, that instead of being a source of grief it becomes a source of fresh hopefulness. The attitude taken is so different from the attitude of common man stricken with grief that we remain agape with a fresh vista of spiritual beauty, a fresh vision, opening before our eyes. We are more than satisfied by it. The poet's interpretation is true ; only it is possible to a person deeply spiritual and conscious of the life divine. Here is a truth which we ordinary mortals had never perceived before. Instead of making us sad and full of grief, it actually makes us exult in the new discovery and elevates us. Thus in Rabindranath, grief is no grief, but a certain source of exultation and moral elevation. There is a certain amount of pathos in the resigned manner in which the poet is prepared to turn away from the lower kinds of attachments and devote himself to higher things.

Shishu : The Crescent Moon.

After Smarana comes Shishu. Many of the poems of the Shishu were translated into English and collected in the book called The Crescent Moon. The Crescent Moon was written at Almora for the diversion of his children who were convalescing there.

The poems are full of a child-like fancy. Many of them at the same time have a deep spiritual significance.

"Where have I come from; where did you pick me up"? the baby asked its mother

The mother answered, half-crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast:—

You were hidden in my heart as its desire my darling.

You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made and unmade you then.

In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother you have lived.

When in my girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it.

Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before sunrise.

For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast.

What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine ?

There is in these poems a tenderness, a pathos, a deep penetrating sympathy with the child mind, a wealth of fancy, a feeling that after all, our more serious business of grown-up days may be as meaningless as the games of childhood. Only, while the games of childhood are more full of the delight of creation and imagination, man's more serious business is without these. It is very often dry and disappointing. Sometimes in the poems of the Shishu the fancy is exaggerated and far-fetched.

Utsarga Poems.

Utsarga (*offering*) followed in 1903. Utsarga is a collection of poems culled from many places and written at different stages. But the prevailing note of these poems has a uniformity of subject and tone. The poems give us a foretaste of the poems of the Gitanjali, which are to come.

There is a presentiment in them of the divine which is to be the one object of the poet's devotion later on. The poet is harkening to the faint footfall which he hears of the Supreme, His shadow passing and repassing him. He (the poet) is not yet certain, about God's presence, and does not know how to adequately describe Him. But the beginnings of the Gitanjali are here, leading to the full realization of a transcendental personal God.

I take pride among people saying I know Thee

On my table of many designs, they see you portrayed in many ways!

So many people coming and calling me, ask—

'Oh, who is He'—ask your acquaintance,

'Oh, who is He?'

Then what can I reply, I have no words,

I only say, 'How do I know? How do I know?'

Thou (secretly) listenest and laughest, They accuse me, of (many) evasions.¹

Like the first flush of love, the poet only feels the first fresh glow of the presence of the Supreme Being in his heart. There is also the shyness accompanying the first experience of love.

There is a poem in this collection, called *Woman*.

'O woman' the poet says, 'if you so list you can draw out the poet's song at your feet, but out of your love you have chosen to dedicate yourself to the meanest domestic chores'. The humility characteristic of woman is the humility of one who realizes that love is greater than all the glamour of worldly splendour. The devotion the woman gives may be unconsciously

prompted by deep love but the poet sees how the power of love transforms the meanest cares into the most coveted offices.

Kheya : Ferry boat.

The Kheya which follows Utsarga distinctly marks a special phase in the poet's spiritual life. To many readers the poems of Kheya are vague. But their very vagueness is significant. The poet turns away from all the interests of this life and is looking forward to crossing the bar. There is a poem in this collection entitled, *Sorrow Personified*.

Even if thou hide thy face, in the darkness, my lord,

I shall recognise thee

If thou come in the form of Death

Clasping thy feet, I shall die.¹

Another poem *Bidaya* (Farewell) contains the following lines:—

Give send-off. Forgive me Friends

I am no more on the path of work

.. .. .

I can not any more come after you all.

.. .. .

I am the sailor of a boat floating over the shoreless deep.

I go wandering over the fathomless without purpose

You all give me farewell.²

The same sentiment of resignation and retirement from the world is expressed in other poems also. There has never

been a time so far when the poet has ceased to take interest in outward nature and retired from the joyful activities of life. Even if his spirit has been restful, it has exulted and revelled in the beauty of the world which lay all around him. The noon-tide drowsiness full of the hum of bees, the dark clouds lowering heavily at the coming of darkness—even these have found a living response in the heart of the poet. But it is only now that he turns away from all the form and colour and music of life and longs to retire into the unknown and the unfathomable. This mood has been brought about by the recent bereavements he had suffered and the temporary loss of interest in life that ensued. But even in this retirement and resignation and turning away from the world, the poet's spirit does not feel absolutely forlorn and lost. He retains his faith in the Lord in whose bosom he longs for rest. As already said in the poem *Dukkhamurti* (Sorrow Personified) quoted above he says:—

If thou come in the Form of Death

Clasping thy feet, I shall die.

This may be a temporary mental phase but it is there. In another poem *Pratiksha* (Expectation) he says:—

I am sitting spreading my bedding on the ground

When will your time for coming be ?¹

He is not without help, without the supreme source of fortitude. But he is anxious to leave this world. In between the lines any one can read the severe wrench he has suffered. We have seen the poet's reaction to his first great bereavement, the death of his wife. The poems of the Smarana are marked by a tenderness and yearning. They follow soon after Naivedya which is marked by a lofty realization of the one-

ness of our spirit with the supreme spirit. Naturally this realization preceding immediately the great blow, has done much to soften its pain and to turn it into a vision of beauty and tenderness. But the Kheya has an undertone of sorrow which when suppressed changes into an attitude of resignation. Prof. Thompson, in his 'Tagore' writes :—

“Kheya—crossing is less easy to accept whole-heartedly, though the execution is everywhere perfect. It is one long wail..... The atmosphere is dreamy, sometimes with a filmy beauty far surpassing anything in Evening Songs, but too often in a manner vaguely exasperating to a robust reader. Further, it must be admitted to be one of his 'streakiest' books, with an unusual proportion of pieces that are just literary exercises. It loses by its monotony, its minor key, and its frequent triviality. He plays too much, and, though the playing is dexterous, there is something heavy in the solemn insistence on the tiny. His flute becomes a vexing toy, and his vague figures, ferry-men or folk waiting for the ferry, tiresome ghosts. His mind was clearly very tired, as well as depressed.” Prof. Thompson quotes the poet's own words further in the course of this passage “I suppose my mind was occupied with the idea of death and crossing. That may have been why I chose the name Kheya.”

There is the key to the poet's whole attitude. Even Prof. Thompson thinks that his attitude was 'depressed'. But there is nothing of triviality in these poems. The poet's heart is bleeding in a physical sense. He does not convert the bleeding into a wail. The necessity of his creed requires that he do not weep for this earthly loss. Just as Hamlet under the shock of the first disclosure by the ghost of his father finds shelter for his

reeling stupefied spirit in an antic disposition ; so Tagore, overwhelmed by sorrow and bereavement, takes refuge in retirement and running away from this world, to some unknown place where his God is waiting for him to receive him into His arms and wipe away all the marks of laceration and pain. There is a spirit of resignation in these poems.

His wife died in December 1902, and his second daughter in 1904.....His elder son died at Mongyr in 1907.....His friend Roy died a year or so earlier. These were years of acute loneliness. Only a supreme sense of something more important could have steeled him and enabled him to put aside the crying sorrow of his own heart.

Kheya was published in 1907. And to my mind Kheya reflects the attitude of this period. It may have been for other reasons, but it was certainly the necessity of his own creed that made him turn this sorrow into a longing for shelter in the bosom of the Lord.

In the poem *Dana* (gift), the lady is waiting in the night for a gift and in the morning she finds instead of the garland, that the gift is a sword. The sword is symbolical of the weapon by which we can cut off the bonds which bind us to our dear objects, in fond worldly ties and make us forget our spiritual relationship. The world has appeared to him in another light now. One after another his dear ones have been dying. To many another man the world would have appeared dark. To him it loses all interest and attraction for the time being. And he hurries away from it and wants to go to a far country, where he hopes to find solace and comfort.

The Partition of Bengal : 1905.

In the midst of all this bereavement his literary and

political activities had to go on. The proposal to partition Bengal came up in 1905, which roused the indignation of the whole country. Rabindranath plunged whole-heartedly into the vortex of this movement and worked in it till about 1908, when disgusted with the violence of his followers he retired from it and devoted himself to his literary pursuits.

Gitanjali : Song Offerings.

In 1911 came the Gitanjali (*Song Offerings*) which made him world famous and won him the Nobel prize in 1913. The English Gitanjali is a collection of verses not only from the Bengali Gitanjali but there are also in it poems included from some earlier collections also. Yet their general tone and significance are the same. The poet gives himself up to meditation. His spirit tries to enter into communion with God, intimations of whose presence the poet receives through the phenomena of nature. The poems are dated, Ashada, Shrawan etc. (*the months of July, August, September etc.*). The poet allows his imagination to sail with the clouds, to run with the breeze and with them to touch the fringe of the Infinite.

He begins by utterly humiliating himself before the feet of God.

O Thou, ! bend my head, under the dust of thy feet.

O ! all my pride, O, drown in the tears of mine eyes.

..

O ! Let thy will be done in my life.¹

This humility, this utter self-abnegation is necessary for the complete realization of God. In the second poem, the poet says :—

I desire many thhings, with all my heart,
 Thou hast saved me by denying mc these
 this cruel favour is all my sore in my life,

.. .. .
 I sometimes lose sight of thee sometimes follow thee,
 holding on to Thy path;

O Thou cruel one, thou oftentimes from my vision disappear'st''¹

In this world the poet had gone in pursuit of many things, but they were denied to him. By denying these, God has saved him from falling into many tempting evils. This strength which the poet has developed by suffering these denials is his only strength. He can now refuse to be lured by the temptations of life. He follows the path of the Lord keeping Him in view, but many times loses sight of Him. He is like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The language of these poems is so simple, and direct, that it goes straight to the heart of the reader. Like all great poetry it is extremely easy and within the understanding of the humble and the lowly. So that without any great culture or training, the lowliest of man can understand these poems and be moved by them and pour out his heart in devotion to the Supreme One.

The theme of all these poems is the striving of the poet's soul to come into intimate contact, and the closest relationship with God. This God is a personal God conceived somewhat in the image of man, but so vast, so pervasive, that He is present everywhere. Intimations of His presence are received through all the changing phenomena of nature. Man's ultimate

destiny is to reach this God and to be received by Him as a friend, devotee, lover, servant. But this God has to be reached by constant striving. Unless he feels the presence of this God, the poet's soul is restless. Unless the poet is in constant communion with Him, he feels smothered by a darkness that oppresses him. God and the soul are in the relationship of the lover and the beloved, of friend and friend, of mother and the baby, so that life without their constant presence to each other is insupportable, burdensome, almost impossible. Each needs the other. The presence of the Lord is felt in all the surroundings of life. Indeed, the wind, the ocean, the forest quivering in the winter breeze, the earth with its pearly drops in the early dawn, are all waiting for Him, waiting with their offerings of flower and scent and song. He comes and goes. His touch is felt and lost. The human spirit as well as the living spirit in these objects is alternately thrilled with the joy of His coming or sad and depressed at losing touch with Him.

45¹

Have you not heard his silent steps ?

He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night, he comes, comes ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, He comes, comes, ever comes

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds, he comes, comes, ever comes,

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.¹

The poet's God is conceived as a personal God at once divine and human. In the Kamala Lectures on the Religion of Man, the poet says :

Why, our intellect is human intellect, our heart is the human heart our imagination is human imagination. What we call knowledge is tested by human intellect, what we call divine bliss even that is bliss kindled in the human consciousness. With this mind, with this bliss, He whom we realize as the Supreme Being is the Divine in the image of man. Outside that human conception whatever exists is immaterial. If in achieving salvation the human personality is obliterated and loses its distinctiveness then there would be no sense in creating man. Is man created to be obliterated before he achieved salvation ?

It is not the presence of the divine everywhere that is intellectually taken for granted, nor realized by an inner vision as in Wordsworth. Tagore's God is a personal God. His personality is vast, all pervasive, all immanent. God must respond to the moods of the human devotee. The idea is that in all moods, in all circumstances, man must be able to woo his God. God has been endowed with some of the human attributes like love, pity. His footsteps are heard in the blades of grass which come silently breaking out of the earth. He is sheer spirit penetrating everywhere. Only He cannot be realized without striving, without effort. The human soul is enmeshed in flesh. Its interests are worldly and its vision confined to outward objects. Only by disengaging it from its

worldly preoccupations, by constant meditation, by the mystic vision, can the presence of the divine be felt and realized. Man has occasional vision of this divine, but to keep it constantly before his eye, great effort is required. This consists partly in giving up all worldly interests and meditating on Him ; but still very often the vigil relaxes, the material world supervenes and the Vision beautiful is lost. The poet views this pursuit of the divine as a human necessity resulting from an ultimate relationship with God. Man is the pursuer and God is the sole object of his pursuit. Without the constant presence of the divine before him the poet is disconsolate. His state of mind is similar to, but more distraught than, that of a lover. His whole approach to the divine is living, emotional, full of a deep fervour. That is why it is so infectious, so appealing. No one who reads these poems can be indifferent to their charm and remain unmoved by their moving power.

They arouse his (reader's) sleeping spirit ; all the worldly concerns fade away as meaningless, irrelevant, and we are made to see God in an intimate relationship with us. This fills us with joy. And we long to remain for ever in this joy. Sometimes this longing so overpowers the poet, that it accentuates itself into pain. But the pain has its sweetness like the pain of love. Many a time, again, a dullness of spirit overtakes the poet and living contact with the Supreme Being seems to be lost ; but the poet waits in faith to recover this contact. Even this spirit of resignation to the will of the Divine, this waiting for Him to rouse the poet's spirit from dullness once again and make him live in His divine presence, have been rendered with a peculiar beauty and charm.

13¹

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The tune has not come true, the words have not been rightly set
only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I
have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my
house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor; but
the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my
house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is
not yet.

Again :

18²

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens.

Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all
alone?

In the busy moments of the noontide world I am with the crowd
but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I
hope.

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I
know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far away gloom of the sky, and my heart
wanders wailing with the restless wind.

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will ~~keep~~ still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking though the sky.
Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

23

Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend? the sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep to-night. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?

26

He came and sat by my side but I awoke not. What a cursed sleep it was. O miserable me!

He came when the night was still, he had his harp in his hands, and my dreams became resonant with its melodies.

Alas, why are my nights all thus lost? Ah, why do I ever miss
his sight whose breath touches my sleep?

In this series of five poems from the English Gitanjali which also occur in the original Bengali Gitanjali, which have been given above, the gradual stages of God-realization can be traced. The poet is the devotee, the beloved, waiting for his lover, the friend of his heart, to come. The lamp is not lit in his house. How can he invite his friend? The poet has only heard the Lord's foot-steps; he has not seen Him.

All this means that though the poet feels the presence of the Divine round about him, there is no light yet in his soul by which he can see His presence. But how very personal, how intimate, how homely, how simple, is the manner of the poets's solicitation! There is a tenderness, a sweet wistfulness about it all. The love analogy shows that the poet is occupied with the thought of his God above everything else. It is the one intimate, secret, longing of his heart, before which everything else has a superficial interest. Rarely has spiritual yearning been put in a more simple, intimate, yet a more moving form. Like unto a youth in love, the one thing which matters to the poet, is the union with his divine loved. Everything else is merely accessory. All the dogmas of priesthood, and theology and religion, seem rigid, hard, lifeless, without meaning, before this solicitation of the Lord. All lyric poetry appeals to the heart and once the heart is captured by these lyric songs, it is put into commu-

nion with the great Heart of the universe. The human spirit is in communion with the divine spirit. The poet is not like a worshipper who sits shut up in a dark corner and meditates on a God that is formless, difficult to conceive and away from this universe. No, the whole universe is pressed into service. It is tributary to the great God. Not only does God give intimations of his presence to the devotee through the sunrise, the sunset, the lightning and the breeze but these themselves wait expectantly to receive the divine awakening touch. Thus the whole universe becomes a macrocosm vibrating with spiritual life, waiting for the divine Spirit, that informs it, to reveal itself through it.

59

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart
 this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds
 sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness
 upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes this is thy message to my
 heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my
 eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet!

97

When my play was with thee I never questioned who thou wert. I
 knew not shyness nor fear, my life was boisterous.

In the early morning thou wouldst call me from my sleep like my own comrade and lead me running from glade to glade.

In those days I never cared to know the meaning of songs thou sangest to me. Only my voice took up the tunes, and my heart danced in their cadence.

Now, when the playtime is over, what is this sudden sight that is come upon me ? The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its stars.

43

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life.

And today when by chance I light upon them and see thy signature, I find they have lain scattered in the dust mixed with the memory of joys and sorrows of my trivial days forgotten.

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star.

Here is the devotee casting his eye to the past and the future and finding everywhere the foot-prints of the Lord. All through, the divine has been present, but man busy in his commerce with the world, failed to detect His presene. There has all along been an inner sub-conscious

longing for a realization of this divine, which longing has now become conscious and insistent and the poet who sees the presence of the Supreme One everywhere now, feels why life should have passed in futile struggles and bickerings, oblivious of the great significance which the presence of the Divine gives to each little fact and act of life.

In the poems which have been quoted, there is a lyricism, which moves us in the extreme, an imagination taking in the universe with a broad sweep which is Miltonic ; only the universe is not sombre and hostile and gloomy like Milton's, but beautiful and intimate and instinct with a spirit like our own. And through the mazes of this universe which are like lighted paths, the poet's spirit is striving to reach Him who is the Lord of us all, and be in His presence. There is no goal higher for man than this. Once in His presence you have joy and strength and immortality.

103

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out
and touch this world at thy feet. Like a rain cloud of July hung
low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down
at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse stains into a single
current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their
mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in
one salutation to thee."

Here is the spirit of man face to face with its God. This is the eternal religion of man, the spirit's striving to free itself from the shackles of the flesh and feel at one with the spirit of the universe, realizing his kinship with everything and ultimately reaching Him who is the Lord and Master of this universe. This is no denominational religion, laying stress on outward forms and ceremonies, and missing the real spiritual content, and dividing man from man.

This is the poet's worship. This is the poet's religion. But it would not be doing justice to him if we stop with this poet's worship of his God. A supreme effort of the spirit is required to lift oneself to this height where one can just touch the fringe of the divine. One can feel this Beautiful presence through the mystic vision. This mystic vision may be granted to a man once or twice in life. But to keep it up, great effort of the spirit is necessary.

The poet's spirit is not content to worship in silence. Opportunities for such worship and moments of God realization may be rare in a man's life. Besides, they might make a man retire into a cloister and turn his back on this beautiful world which is the handiwork of God. At the same time man can not always get away from the press and stress of daily work. He cannot run away from the common crowd. The poet would be false to his religion, and to his innermost vision, if he felt lost and forlorn at such times.

Even in the midst of the busiest moments of life, the poet feels that, contact with God, consciousness of His presence, should not be lost.

10

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest and lost.

When I try to bow to thee my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest and the lost.

11

Leave this chanting and telling of beads ! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut ? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee.

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil !

Deliverance ? Where is this deliverance to be found ? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation ; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense ! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

Our worship of Him is not complete unless it includes the humblest and the lowliest. If we worship Him in

seclusion, holding ourselves aloof in our pride from the poor and the lowly, we are missing Him. This world with all its play of wind and rain and storm, its day and night, its human struggle and endeavour, is the scene of His action. In order to realize Him we must partake of it fully. If we shun this world in derision and meditate in seclusion, we are insulting the great God, and denying Him to us.

To sum up. It was said in the beginning of this essay that Tagore's poetry was the poetry of joy. Tagore started in his Morning Songs with this revelation borne in upon him that this universe was a great flood of joy embracing everything in its waves. There could be nothing but unalloyed joy in that realization. From nature poetry, he passed on to love poetry. His love poetry betrays moments of satiety but the light in his soul keeps on burning. He feels the grossness of mere physical love, but as a flame burning in the human heart and flooding it with light is joy inexpressible. Even when love is unrequited and causes sorrow and pain, it is sweet. Witness this from the gardener.

Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop, while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is strong and abiding, Let sorrowful love wake in your eyes.

.
But it is a heart, my beloved. Where are its shores and its bottom ?

You know not the limits of this kingdom, still you are its queen.

If it were only a moment of pleasure it would flower in an easy smile and you could see it and read it in a moment.

If it were merely a pain it would melt in limpid tears, reflecting its inmost secret without a word,

But it is love, my beloved.

Its pleasure and pain are boundless, and endless its want and wealth,

It is as near to your life, but you can never wholly know it.¹

From love poetry, the poet passes on gradually to religious poetry. This is full of faith and hope and a constant striving of the human soul for union with the supreme Soul, There is joy in the very contemplation of this possibility, The poet never doubts for a moment that this can come about. To him, this union is a necessity of our spiritual nature. God desires it as much as man.

58

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song—the joy that makes the earth flow in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust and knows not a word.

The poet is in a state of mystic consciousness wherein he realizes his own spiritual nature and his oneness with the whole spiritual universe. There is no death to this nature.

The material aspects of this universe are merely transitory. Their changing and rechanging does not affect him in the least. He takes joy in the changes of the seasons, in the winds and the storm and the play of life and death which only creates and uncreates shapes. Separation is sweet because it is waiting or the ultimate union. Sorrow may be bitter but its ultimate fruits are sweet. Sorrow helps us to cast off the illusions of this earth which we hug as permanent and necessary to satisfy our human appetites. As, one after another, the illusory temptations vanish, we grieve; we think we have sustained a loss. But they only help to remove the dross and bring out our spirit in its pristine parity. Sorrow helps us to realize our immortal heritage, our soul which cannot suffer any loss, any diminution; whose one joy is to seek union with the supreme Soul. Sorrow is therefore only the beginning of an optimism, of a hope, of ultimate joy.

There is neither any consciousness of sin throughout the whole range of Tagore's poetry. Nature is a source of pure, unalloyed joy to him. Human love has got its aspect of pleasure and its pain, leading to spiritual awakening. Then there is the quest of the human spirit for the divine spirit whose presence it has felt and constantly feels.

Sin is the consciousness that man has deliberately acted against the dictates of goodness in order to gratify some passing appetite or earthly desire. It divides the soul, the better part full of a fear of the consequences of the sin and the worse, like a drunkard possessed with the itch to drink, blind to all better considerations.

There is no such fear of sinfulness in Tagore's poetry. If there is a feeling of drunkenness, of abandon, of resignation, it is

an abandonment to joy that is all round him, the joy in nature and the joy in the soul of man.

Sin ultimately leads to the ruination of the human soul. No better example of extreme sinfulness could be cited than from Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*..

Faustus :—No Fautus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer Tha, hath
deprived thee of the joys of heaven..

(The clock striketh twelve).

O it strikes : now body turn to air,

Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell:

(Thunder and lightning)

O soul, be change into little water drops,
And fall into the ocean, never be found,

My God, look not so fierce on me :

(Enter Devils)

Adders and serpents, let me breath a while :

Ugly hell gape not, come not Lucifer,

I'll burn my books, ah Mephistophiles.

(Exeunt with him)

Enter Chorus.

Chorus: Cut is the branch that might have grown full
straight,

And burned is Apollo's laurel bought.

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Set against this the last poems from Tagore's *Gitanjali*,
In this life on earth, the poet possessed his soul in joy and
when he is about to bid good bye to this mortal habitation of
his, he passes out with his soul on its way back home to the Lord.
This is beauty and joy and purity and love and bliss.

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light and thus am I blessed—let this be my parting word.

In this play house of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come—let this be my parting word.

Let us close this essay with the following hymn of prayer for our country.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high :

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth :

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action—

Into that haven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

PART II

HIS MYSTICISM : FOUR PHASES.

Rabindranath is a born mystic. Mysticism is part and pareel of his life. It is the stuff of his poetry.

Generaly poets are, more or less, all mystics. The beauty and the truth that they see, any new significance that they come to find in life, is revealed to them by intuition, during moments of vision. This intuition is an inner power which sees in a moment a new truth, finds the solution of a problem with which the mind has been subconsciously grappling for a long time. Intuition is the focal point of our inner search which has been been going on in the subconscious mind for quite a long time. It is the miner's headlight revealing things which might otherwise lie buried under a cover of darkness.

The difference between intuition and the mystic vision may be that while intuition throws light on detached problems of life, mystic vision is comprehensive: It is the eye of the soul, the complete soul of man awakening to an inner comprehension of its relationship with the ultimate reality. Once this vision has come and gone, it may leave a portion of itself in which the soul's relationship with the ultimate reality may be conceived in a particular form. But it appears that in all mystics the first vislon comprises the whole universe or extends as far as consciousness can go.

To Rabindranath the vision came one day in Calcutta when he was about twenty one years of age. He has himself

described this in his own words. Before this his poetry which is contained mostly in Evening Songs shows a sadness, a depression, a vague longing, indicating the lull before the storm. The great flood of his spirit was about to break forth and the Evening Songs shows the burden of this new life that was to break out and that was weighing on his spirit. This is what the poet himself says about this experience.

“Then I gained a further insight which has lasted all my life.

“The end of Sudder Street, and the trees on the Free School ground opposite, were visible from our Sudder street house. One morning I happened to be looking on the verandah, looking that way. The sun was just rising among the leafy tops of those trees. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light.

“That very day the poem, The Awakening of the Waterfall gushed forth and coused on like a veritable cascade. The poem come to amend, but the curtain did not fall upon the joy aspect of the universe.

“As I would stand on two balcony the gait, the figure the features of each one of the passers-by, whoever they might be, seemed to all so extraordinarily wonderful as they flew past,—waves on

the sea of the universe. From infancy I had seen only with my eyes I now began to see with the whole of my consciousness. I could not look upon the sight of two smiling youths, nonchalantly going their way, the arm of one on the other's shoulder as a matter of small moment: for through it I could see the fathomless depths of the eternal spring of joy, from which numberless sprays of laughter leap up throughout the world.

His whole outlook was thenceforward changed. All objects seemed to him now to be penetrated with a spirit of joy.

This occasion in the poet's life may be compared with a similar occasion in the lives of other mystics. Here is from the autobiography of his own father, the Maharshi :—

On the night before Didima's² death I was sitting at Nimtola³ Ghat, on a coarse mat near the shed. It was the night of the full moon, the moon had risen, the burning ground was near, They were singing the holy name to Didima Will such a day ever come, when uttering the name of Hari,¹ life will leave me; The sounds reached my ears faintly, borne on the night wind; at this opportune moment a strange sense of the unreality of all things entered my mind. I was as if no longer the same man A strong aversion to wealth arose within me. The coarse bamboo mat on which I sat seemed to be my fitting seat, carpets and

costly spreadings seemed hateful, in my mind was awakened a joy unfelt before. I was then eighteen years old.

‘With this sense of joy and renunciation I returned home at midnight.’³

The element of joy is common to both the mystics, as well as a feeling of detachment. It may be pointed out here how our poet himself had tried to get rid of his egoistic feeling before the mystic vision came to him.

The Maharshi says earlier in his reminiscences. ‘I could see at once that it was the effect of the evening, which had come within me; its shades had obliterated myself. While the self was rampant during the glare of the day, everything I perceived was mingled with and hidden by it. Now that the self was put into the back-ground, I could see the world in its own true aspect. And that aspect has nothing of triviality in it, it is full of beauty and joy. Since this experience I repeatedly tried the effect of deliberately suppressing myself and viewing the world as a mere spectator, and was invariably rewarded with a sense of special pleasure.’

There has to be some kind of discipline, some obliteration of the self or renunciation and then the mystic vision comes to those gifted.

It does not, however, last. Only the effect of it and its memory, remain.

Our poet later on says about his own vision. ‘when after ascending the mountains (Himalayas) I looked around, I was at once aware I had lost my new vision,’⁴

He had gone to the majestic Himalaya mountains in the hope of further reinforcing this vision. Grand and sublime objects do arouse this vision, but in the case of the poet it was the little house in Sudder street. Sometimes, even the contemplation of the meanest thing may give rise to it, the readiness is all. The poet himself says "However sky piercing the king of mountains may be, he can have nothing in his gift for me; while He (God) who is the Giver can vouchsafe a vision of the eternal universe in the dingiest of lanes, and in a moment of time."¹

Another instance may be cited of how this vision comes to a person who has got the gift of this vision and who is ripe for it. It is taken from the autobiography of J. Trevor quoted in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

"One brilliant Sunday morning, my wife and boys went to the unitarian chapel in Macclesfield. I felt it impossible to accompany them—as though to leave the sunshine on the hills, and go down there to the chapel, would be for the time an act of spiritual suicide. And I felt such need for new inspiration and expansion in my life. So, very reluctantly and sadly. I left my wife and boys to go down into the town, while I went further up into the hills with my stick and my dog. In the loveliness of the morning, and the beauty of the hills and valleys, I soon lost my sense of sadness and regret. For nearly an hour I walked along the road to the 'Cat and Fiddle', and then returned. On the way back, suddenly, without warning, I felt that I was in Heaven—an inward state of peace and joy and assurance, indescribably intense, accompanied with a sense of being bathed in a warm glow of light, as though the external condition had brought about the internal effect—a feeling of having passed beyond the body

though the scene around me stood out more clearly and as if nearer to me than before, by reason of the illumination in the midst of which I seemed to be placed. This deep emotion lasted, though with decreasing strength until I reached home, and for some time after, only gradually passing away." Even in the case of the Maharshi. the mystic feeling came but did not remain with him. This is what the Maharshi has said in his *Autobiography*.

"Then I tried to recover the joy of the night previous to Didima's death. But I never got it back.....a deep gloom settled on my mind. I longed for a repetition of that ecstatic feeling. I lost all interest in everything else. Great grief was in my heart. Darkness was all around me. Though temptations of the world had ceased, but the sense of God was no nearer.....Life was dreary.....I then felt a strong desire to learn Sanskrit."

In our poet who was not in quest of God. the reaction did not come so suddenly nor was it so pronounced. As long as the feeling of joy resulting from that mystic vision lasted, the poetry he wrote described the beauty of, and his joy in, the objects of nature. This beauty and joy was conceived as part of the universal beauty and joy which was revealed to him. The *Awakening of the Fountain* signified the awakening of his spirit. In the ocean of universal joy, all objects were conceived as merely waves of joy taking a particular earthly shape and reminding the poet of that one universal joy which was everywhere, which was at the core of all this universe and which flowed through these objects. The mystic revelation that came to him showed all objects in a new light, not as gross material things but merely as parts of a great flood of joy issuing from

some ultimate source of beauty and joy. There are only two ideas here—the idea of universal oneness and second, the idea of surface physical changes which appeared as earthly phenomena, but which were to the mystic's eye merely parts of that universal oneness. Thus since all this universe had become one and since men and things were merely like waves (of manifestation) on this (mystic) ocean of oneness, and since that ocean of oneness was vital, the origin and the ultimate receptacle of all objects, there was no death to anything. Things only vanished for a time, like waves dipping into the ocean to rise again. There was no sorrow. There was only joy, the joy of realization that all narrow limits of our being had been abolished and that our life had infinitely greater freedom and scope than we thought even the waves and the wind enjoyed. But there was yet no idea of God or Divinity, and no effort to reach out to it in the spirit of a devotee or a worshipper. The devotional outlook had not yet come.

The following two lines from (*Mahaswamī*) "The great dream" from the Morning Songs clearly shows this :—

This is the realm of dream, the beings of this dream
kingdom

How many shapes they assume, newer and newer,
again and again.

The great dream is here the great vision, the central abiding reality. This is also sometimes revealed to him through music that is silent and this music comes to him through the beautiful phases of this life. In *Pratidhwani* (Echo) in the Morning songs, there is a music playing at the core of this universe, and the sights and sounds of this earth, merely reflect this music to the poet and thus keep him in mind constantly of this silent eternal melody that is at the heart of this universe.

The song of the forest, of the mountain, the ocean
 The song of the thunder, the song of the
 lighting.

The song of the day, the evening, the night,
 The murmur of the wakeful and the sleeping
 The song of the spring, the rains and the autumn
 The music of life and death,
 The foot-fall of light in the dark deep
 Pervading the whole universe

 moving and unmoving;

The song of the earth, the moon and the burning planets
 and the

 many many stars,

I know not, in which apartment of this universe
 (they) mingle with your (song).

therefore make me sit once

 in that great night of darkness,

I shall hear the music of this universe;
 with eyes shut.

How it sounds through your mouth.

The poet is harkening to the silent music at the heart of the universe which he can hear. From Morning Songs, he passes on to Pictures and Songs. The songs and the pictures are now concerned with objects in nature. The vision of a universe of beauty, music, and joy has receded. But the glow of light is still in his eyes and the music in his heart, so that these pictures and songs though describing definite objects and singing about particular themes still have a touch of the infinite about them. The joy which the objects arouse is part of the infinite joy and the music of the songs is a snatch from that infinite melody.

Passing through Sharps and Flats and Manasi, we come to his poems collected under the title of Sonar Tari (The Golden Boat). Sharps and Flats and Manasi are mostly full of his earlier love poetry, many pieces being descriptive, many lyrical and some in the form of dramatic monologues. The charm of physical attraction, the beauty of person, the various moods and facets of love, its intensity and satiety, have all been described here.

Towards the end of Manasi the poet realizes the futility of mere dalliance. Physical charm is empty without the underlying warmth of love. A person cannot remain sunk in indulgence all the time without getting fed up with it and even turning away in disgust from it.

The sense that life is meaningless without some continued purpose seems to make the poet turn away from this life of idle musings. The end of Manasi is marked by certain sarcastic poems on the slothful habits of his countrymen and their fond notions.

From Gazipur where he wrote the poems of the Manasi the poet is called to take charge of the Zamindari at Sialdah on the banks of the Padma. From a life of retirement and speculative reverie, he is brought face to face with the responsibilities of life. He is in daily contact with the peasant and the worker and knows the joys, the sufferings and the hardships of their life. He lives mostly in a boat on the Padma and moves from place to place watching the river in all its moods, and the life of the people on its banks. He was moving from scene to scene and observing life in all its uncertainties and vicissitudes. The broad expanse of the Padma, with the plains of Bengal stretching endlessly on either side, open to the

sky and swayed by the wind and the charming weather, formed the setting of his life.

He was also at this time busy with the editorship of the *Sadhana*. This magazine was devoted to a discussion of the various social, religious, scientific and political problems of the day. Contemporary with the *Sadhana* was the *Nava Jiwan*, the organ of the orthodox Hindus of his time. As a reaction against the weakness and senility that had overtaken the country, a cult of *Sakti* (Power) was developing among the orthodox. The *Sakti* stood for the goddess of might and destruction. It was a half spiritual-half-physical concept of a deity which might help the regeneration of a decrepit people. The concept of such an artificial man-created deity, was repugnant to the poet. The doctrine of the *Adwait* was also in the air. It said that there was only one spiritual principle in the universe and all the multiplicity of life was illusion, (*maya*). The vogue among the followers of the *Adwait* doctrine was to preach retirement from the world and give themselves up to meditation in silence and seclusion. This was contrary to all the cherished dreams and beliefs of the poet. Though he believed in the oneness of this universe, the oneness comprized all its diversiry. While the poet took delight in the variegated beauty of the infinite shapes and colour and music of the universe, the followers of *Adwait* turned away from all this *maya* and devoted themselves to the realization of an abstract principle of the universe which exists nowhere except in the imagination. Theirs was accordingly, to the poet, a futile, misguided pursuit. In the poems *Khela* (Play) and *Bandhan* (Bondage) and *Mukti* (Deliverance), in the Golden Boat,

the poet says :

Let it be play, we have to join this play

With the All, full of joy and music

Where shall we sit, becoming silent and

leaving everything,

In the dark corner of the inside of

our heart ?

(No). With humility, faith and love, take up in your
hand

This great play-thing full of colour and fragrance
and song,

Which the mother (Earth) has given you.

Here is also a deification of this earth. Mother earth with all the greenery of her fields, the water in her lakes and rivers, her tremulous forests, her woods echoing with the song of birds, has become living and soulful. Her eyes are full of the tears of love and her heart trembling with infinite pity. There is no better place for the human heart than this warm living bosom of our mother earth. Heaven is a dead, dry, insensate place in comparison. All the milk of human kindness and all the honey of human love can be found only on this earth.

This was probably the poet's counter-blast to the goddess of *Sakti* which the orthodox section of his countrymen had conjured up. The poet's depiction of the earth as our mother with her profound love and pity for her children, was more natural than the artificial creation of *Kali* the goddess of *Sakti*. While mother earth claims our natural affection and

our devotion, the worship paid to *Kali*, is artificial—a result of priestly training.

The poet also lashes against the cult of *Mukti* preached by the followers of the *Adwait*, who want us to run away from the bondage of *maya* (illusion),

The poem which naturally follows as a sequel to this is on *Mukti* (deliverance).

In *Mukti*, the poet's exhortation is all for entering the world's fair and taking part in the world's festival. It may not be all joy here. But there is beauty and love and compassion, which give meaning and depth to man's spirit, as against the emptiness of the contemplation of deliverance.

The poems *Farewell to Heaven* and others, are in the same key. This earth, this living universe, are extolled and heaven is shown as dry, insensate, unfeeling, lifeless, in comparison. The praise of the earth as our living, sustaining mother, is not merely intellectual. It comes from the heart of the poet. He responds to her, even as a son would reciprocate the affections of his mother. The poet's vision has become mystic once again. He has transformed this earth into a living, breathing, entity, pulsating with a life and vibrating with an emotion as vast as itself. She is the great mother bringing to birth her children, nourishing and feeding them, hedding tears over their griefs; helpless in the last resort, to save them from the jaws of death. And yet like our human mother, she sits weeping over their fate. To turn our backs on her and go in quest of a mere empty phantasm-heaven, or to worship an artificial image with its helplessness, in the narrowness of blind fetish, is extremely foolish and narrow-sighted.

And what an ardour and keenness the poet lends to this devotion to mother earth.

At the same time the poet's attention is turned to the contemplation of human life. Looked at in its totality, man's life does neither begin with his birth nor end with his death. Life goes farther than the limits set by birth and death.

In one of his letters the poet writes:—

“How suddenly for a moment from time to time, the habitual material outlook of every day, would vanish I know not ; then with a new vision I would see myself, the scene in front of me, and the present, painted on the paste board of eternity. Many a time I used to look at life and this earth in such a way that it gave rise to infinite wonder. I cannot explain to others how I did this.”¹

And again :—

‘ It is my belief that all our affection, all our love, is only the worship of the mysterious one—only we perform this worship unconsciously ; love is the conscious awakening of the power residing in this universe and inside us—the momentary access of that joy which is at the root of this whole universe.”²

From a love of life, (not in any materialistic sense,) love of this earth, the poet passes on to a contemplation of sheer beauty. This finds a culmination in his poem *Urvasi*.

Uvarsi is a creation compact of all that is beautiful in colour, form and rhythm. She is bright with splendour and alive to the edges of her skirt. Urvasi is the product of the highest stretch of the poet's imagination, touched with a certain delicate sensibility.

But through his poems of this period there is a certain under-current of dissatisfaction with the world, a sort of disillusionment. Detached sights and sounds do not satisfy him now as they did in Pictures and Songs, or his Morning period. Even detached experiences of life with a certain sense of joy about them do not satisfy him.

Urvashi is the creation and culminating point of a mind which is drawing to the end of the life of sensations and is about to cease to feel pleasure only in the visible beauties of this world. The poet's mind is already groping for something abiding and underlying all these phenomena. A spiritual basis for all that is earthly is absolutely necessary to sustain the poet's faith as also his muse. The *Jivandevata* affords this sustenance. It is the discovery of an abiding spirit underlying all the changing phases of a man's life. It is the result of a mystic vision. Though the *Jivandevata* may be puzzling to many people and though its meaning may be blurred and indistinct to the students and readers of Rabindranath now, it was a palpable spiritual reality to him then. And even if we fail to define it, we can feel the presence and the reality of it as we read his poems of those days. That it is not co-extensive with the spirit of the universe, that it is felt apart from the spirit that actuates the life of the whole creation, can be seen from a perusal of the poems. But that the poet felt the need of some abiding spiritual sustenance at this time, and that the *Jivandevata* poems give him profound spiritual solace and satisfaction in a world where he is likely to feel lost between one interest and another, there is absolutely no doubt about. This will be clear from the following quotations from some of his *Jivandevata* poems.

"Lord, is all that now over
what ever was mine ?

All that beauty, that song, that life, the waking
and the sleep ?

Has the bond of twining arms become loose ?
My kiss lost its drunkenness ?

In the bower of life the night of tryst,
Has it changed into dawn ?

Then break up the meeting of this day
Bring new form, bring new beauty

Making me new, take me again,
The ever old one ?

For the poet, life is now emptied of all its joy and zest. He is anxious that he should appear on this earth in a new form, in a new shape.

The idea in the last lines is that the poet's life is immortal and has passed through many cycles. When this present life (which is one in the cycle) becomes old and decrepit and spiritless, the God of his life (*Jivandevata*) should cast off the decrepitude so that he (poet) may appear here again, young and fresh, like a new bride meeting her lover. The poet longs for some new wine of life, same fresh inspiration. some new vision, to be instilled into him.

The difficulties in translating the idea and making it intelligible through the medium of English, show that it cannot be depicted in clearcut terms and made understandable to a person of rigid logical-bent of mind. But to those who can read these lines in the original, the *Jivandevata* will appear to be a real palpable deity (spiritual principle.) Prof. Thompson in his book on Tagore says : "and Sonar Tari and Chitra could hardly be read right through by any foreigner, however

great his admiration for Rabiranath, without exasperation sometimes." But with an attitude less critical and exacting and more mystically inclined, it is possible to realize the *Jivandevata* and feel its presence in moments of quiet contemplation.

And the *Jivandevata* is an early realization of a deep spiritual principle. It comes after his first mystic vision in the Morning Songs which he had at the age of twenty one. The poet had not yet completely detached himself from worldly concerns. He was intensely interested in the business and cares and pleasures of life. But his mystic nature yearned for something more abiding, more satisfying, to his spirit. And his penetrating vision seeking for satisfaction of this, lights upon this deeper spiritual reality. Prof. Thompson further says. "But it would be as unwise to press anything in the *Jivandevata* idea as Rabindranath's definite belief, otherwise than in a poetic sense, as it would be to treat similarly Wordsworth's pre-existence teaching in the *Intimations Ode*. The idea is not susceptible of simple exposition; but it shows us an Eastern mind in contact with Western thought, and sinking its plummet into that subconscious which modern psychology has brought forward, and using the thought of today as a key to ancient speculation."

Though there may be no definite intellectual belief in the *Jivandevata* poems which becomes fixed for all time, there is a spiritual experience of a reality. And it is this same reality of which Tagore has had a vision now, that grows into the deeper and more pervading reality of his God of the Gitanjali. The effect of the western thought on the poet's mind is only in so far as he wants to submit his spiritual vision to an intellectual philosophy and give it a name. It is not possible to

reduce the *Jivandevata* idea to a correct system of thought. But as an insight into spiritual reality it is true.

“On this infinite table (world) of desire,

is only inscribed,

the dream of the ever thirsty-the illusive image.”²

The visible world is a deceptive dream. The poet longs for something, real, lasting, permanent, sustaining.

The need for a spiritual basis of life, is again evident here. The poet realises that the thousand and one objects he had been pursuing in this life are mere illusion and this must have led to self introspection and the vision of a more abiding reality, which he tried to name and explain as *Jivandevata*. It must here be mentioned about Rabindranath Tagore that all his mystic experiences are his own, either coming spontaneously as in the case of his first vision of the infinite or born of a deep necessity created by the thirst of his soul for something that is permanent and abiding. Rabindranath is a singer, a poet and a mystic. As a singer he sings songs, as a poet he invests the sights and sounds of this world with a charm and splendour, and as a mystic, he dives deep down into the heart of things and sees their inner reality. It is out of this mystic insight that he creates his God. The second thing to note here is that Tagore always preserves his individuality. At the highest moment of his God-consciousness, he may forget his ownself. That is the moment of his union with the supreme One, his moment of tryst. But otherwise, his spirit is always there as a distinct entity constantly striving for union with the divine spirit. For God-realization. And he feels a peculiar joy in this striving. The quest after the divine spirit is more important to him than its ultimate realisation. With Tagore a constant feeling is there that all things share in the spiritual life of this

universe and this consciousness grows and becomes more pervasive with years. The feeling that he himself is a partaker in the spirit of the life of this universe, fills him with joy. But though man's essential nature is divine, as an earthly creature he is handicapped by the flesh and beset by earthly impediments which make his search (*Sadhana*) so difficult. The knowledge of his limitations and shortcomings leads to a sense of humility. And the earnest striving after self-realization and God-realization in all the humility of spirit give a religious tone of solemnity to his poetry.

After Chitra he passes through Chaitali (The Last Rice) and Katha, Kahini, Kalpana, through Kanika to Kshanika (momentary). This marks the end of his period of stay on the banks of the river Padma. Chaitali (last Rice) which generally comes in the month of Chaitra (March-April), marks the close of the year. Metaphorically it also marks the end of a period of his activity. The poems of this collection are as usual, on all sorts of sundry subjects. There is the beauty of nature. In the poem *Vana* (forest) he addresses the forest and says :—

How swaying in various ways
You play with the children ; with the old
You carry on ancient talk—the eternal theme.

The beauty of nature is here. And added to it is the mystic feeling of the relationship of the forest with the young and old. Indeed, Tagore never loses this mystic vision, and it gives a strange charm and intimacy to all his writings. In the poem *Prarthana* (prayer) he prays that bitterness should not enter his heart. Though Tagore is a mystic and the predominating emotion of his poems is joy, he is as much subject to the exigencies of temper as any body else. His one endeavour always seems to have been to keep hold on the truth that his

mystic vision had revealed to him and to treat all life's exigencies as ephemeral and unimportant.

Then come Katha and Kalpana. Katha contains patriotic and religious stories of old.

The poet seems to have gone out to these themes of ancient and mediaeval times as through them he could express his philosophy and his outlook on life. Kalpana is full of poems on all subjects. As in Katha, in Kalpana also his mind seems to travel back to ancient scenes in which he can find scope for his imagination and satisfaction for his inner craving for a higher life. There are some poems on Kalidas whom Tagore regarded as the greatest poet of ancient India and whose poetry contains the highest of both, wordly the spiritual wisdom. But the old assurance of the *Jivandevata* days seems to have eluded him for a time and he is casting about once again disconsolately for sustenance for his muse and his spirit. The poem *The year's end* coming towards the end of the poems collected in the Kalpana is an indication of this and shows his mood at the moment. It is customary with mystics that they should either live in the light of the realization of a deep truth or they are dispirited and this earthly life seems to them empty of any content and altogether meaningless.

By the path by which myriads of people are going
in dreadful silence

By the side of that path

Keep me on one side, I shall observe your infinite form
Of the ages past,

Like a hawk suddenly tearing down, take me high up
from the mud pond,

Put me face to face with the great Death
 In the flash of the thunder.

.

In the sugarcane grove which is newly sprouting
 shower of rain is falling
 without rest

By the path behind the clouds, from
 darkness to darkness,

The day has vanished,

In the quiet air, in the murmur of the insects,
 in the loving fragrant breath of the earth.

In the open window,

I have finished the last song of the year, offering it with
 folded hands

Amid the silence of the heavens.

This shows that the poet has made his last offering to nature and has started in quest of a deeper, albeit, a more dreadful truth.

From Kalpana we pass on to Kshanika. As its very title (Momentary) suggests, most of the poems in it contain a playful momentary mood. It appears the poet has reached some haven of consolation and is taking a leisurely look at the world and its objects. They appear to him very pleasing and delightful like unto a man who is about to bid goodbye to the scenes of his erst-while activity and to whom all things wear a holiday look. He is also sensible of the pain at parting and looks back upon nature with a deep wistful longing. Not that he is going to bid goodbye to this world of nature, but his whole outlook on life is undergoing a transformation, like that of a person on the verge of renouncing the world.

I know easily, behind you

There is so much of the game of teasing ?

When there is the suffusion of a smile outside

Inside there are tears in your eyes.¹

The world appears to the poet to wear a smile on the outside but inside, she feels the touch of pain. The poet has become familiar with the earth's smiles and her tears. He is about to bid goodbye to this earth of his youthful enjoyment and to don the robes of an ascetic. But before he does it and his outlook changes from one of joy in nature and her beauties, he will take a last look at her in a half serious, half-sporting, manner. His attitude at this time is more or less detached and he is able to see the beauties of this world and the relationship of man to man with a more penetrating eye than ever before. At the same time his mind takes these sights and sounds and human goings and comings with a cheerful light-heartedness. The language of the poems of the *Kshanika* has also a special peculiarity about it which heightens their appeal. The poet himself says :—

“In *Kshanika* I first found my language. In Evening Songs, I first found my genius ;in *Kshanika* I realized the beauty and music of the colloquial speech. That gave me an extraordinary sense of joy and power. I felt I could use absolutely any word I chose.”

“Readers were amazed.

.....There had been nothing like it in our literature before.”² This language he was to use afterwards, as the vehicle of his highest songs in the *Gitanjali*. It is this simplicity of language and the beauty of rhythm and the use of common metaphor that place the songs of the *Gitanjali* within the reach of the common man.

Here is a poem from the *Kshanika* which is ex a
beautiful and delicate and charming:—

When the two sisters go to fetch water,
they come to this spot and they smile.
Their pitchers lurch suddenly, and
water spills when they reach this spot.
They must have found out that
somebody's heart is beating who stands
behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

The two sisters glance at each other
when they come to this spot, and they smile.
There is a laughter in their swift-stepping feet, which makes con-
fusion in somebody's mind who stands behind the trees when
ever they go to fetch water.²

There is nothing of the fever of passion here ; not even the
sad disillusion of *Man's Rejonider* and *Woman's Rejoinder* as
in *Manasi*. This is a pure depiction of a situation, done with
such a penetrating eye and so much of knowing sympathy, that
not the least little flutter of the heart, nor the least little change
of feeling, escapes the poet. It gives pleasure by its mood of
lovelornness, its simplicity and its delicate sensitiveness to
human emotion.

In the *Kshanika* the poet bids adieu to his past. The
farewell is full of a longing, lingering sadness. This invests
every object which he described, with added beauty and charm.
Before bidding goodbye to this life of joy in nature and the
world he says :—

A serious tale in a serious tone,
To relate to you,

I have no courage.
I try to pass off in joke
My own life's story.

Further :—

On the bank of the drunken earth, do I
want anything else?
I have told you, friend
No, no I have none
No business with anything."

The following is from the poem *Samapti* (End) in
'Kshanika'.

What is that sign in the tired eye,
The stream of the water of tears?
The varied story of the varied paths
Is it written on the forehead?
I have closed your window
The cool bedding has been spread
In the light of your evening lamp
Thou and I are alone.

The Thou and I are his God and he, The poet has bid final goodbye to his past life. It is a life written in tears. Now he wants to turn away from it and be alone with his God. Already in the Kahini he was preoccupied with this theme of duty and man's relationship to God. In the poems of this time he tried to continue with the worldly side of life but he seems to have found the effort too much.

The call of duty had come. He is shifting to Shantiniketan and establishing himself there to be in daily communion with his God and render selfless service to his fellowman.

This marks the beginning of the third phase of his spiritual life. His inspiration now are the *Upanishads*. Like the ancient Rishis he wants to lead a life of dedication, dedication to the universal spirit and daily his duty. His father, the Maharshi derived his religion from the *Upanishads* and Rabindranath followed in his footsteps. This is what Ravindranath writes in one of his essays *Tapovana*. It is difficult to translate this word into English. But it can be explained as a forest school, a school where they dedicate themselves to self-realization through mental and moral discipline.

“The path of realization which India has adopted, is the union of the mind with the universal spirit, the union of our spirit with this spirit, that is complete union. Not only the union of knowledge, that is, not only the training (in our schools and colleges) of skill in the factory, of passing a school or college examination ; our real training is in the forest school, training of being at one with nature, becoming pure by an austere life.

The poet had the following inscription placed on the gate of the school :

Here in this Ashram the One Inviible God is to be worshipped.

The poet must start the worship in the manner his father the Maharshi had done. Whenever the Maharshi went to Shantiniketan he would sit in meditation for hours, chanting hymns of the *Upanishads* and holding communion with the Supreme Deity. This is what the Maharshi says at one place in his *Autobiography*.

“When I was in this depressed state of mind, one day all of a sudden I saw a page from some Sanskrit book flutter past me. Out of curiosity I picked it up, but found I could understand nothing of what was written on it. I said to

Shyamacharan Bhattacharya who was sitting by me.....
 'do you decipher the meaning of the verses on this page.'

Soon afterwards (he) came to me. On reading the page he said, 'why, this is the Isopanishat.'

'When I learnt the explanation of '*Isavasyamidam sarvam*',¹ from Vidyavagish, nectar from paradise streamed down upon me. I had been eager to receive a sympathetic response from men, now a divine voice had descended from heaven to respond, in my heart of hearts and my longing was satisfied. I wanted to see God everywhere and what did I find in the Upanishads? I found 'If the whole world could be as it is, encompassed by God, where would impurity be?.... I had never heard my most intimate thoughts expressed anywhere else.

'I obtained what I had wished for, and was utterly filled with joy.' This influenced Ramindranath also. This I call his third phase of mystic self-realization. Though he always felt the presence of some spirit, this is the first clear and complete realization of the supreme Spirit creating and governing this universe. Henceforth he sings of this with a completeness of realization and the joy that attends such realization. The *Naivedya* is full of this realization of the supreme Being, of the dedication of his spirit to this great Spirit. Half the poems of *Naivedya* are devoted to this theme; the remaining half deal with a patriotic theme whose aim is service to his people, but the underlying basis of this patriotism is also the realization of the unity of the spirit of all men and its presence in the all-pervading divine Spirit.

Regarding the mysticism of the *Upanishads*, Prof. S. M. Das Gupta says :

“This crude form of mysticism (Vedic) was succeeded by the higher mysticism of the *Upanishads* (about 700 B. C.) which is full of the throbbings of a rapturous experience which melt at the touch of the great reality of the self. This is an intuitive grasp which is by nature superior to all ordinary kinds of knowledge and which one could have only as the outcome of superior moral elevation, consisting of an extreme control of the senses, self-denial, desirelessness, and other moral virtues of purity, contentment etc. This intuitive experience is said to be of *Brahman* which was the same as the immortal essence of our own selves and should on no account be confused with the ego or the ordinary phenomenal self of worldly life. This experience is such that all distinctions vanish here, and it is, therefore, indefinable and indescribable and can only be pointed out negatively as not being anything else that we know or can know. All distinctions of sense experience or of logical thought melt here into one whole experience of supreme blessedness which is the one reality and truth’.

From this time the sole striving of the poet was to realize this *Brahman*, which was the same as the immortal essence of his own spirit.

One of the earlier poems of the *Naivedya* (Offering) which is a collection of the poems of dedication to the Lord *Brahman* at this time, is as follows :—

They who are near to me do not know that
 you are nearer to me than they are.
 They who speak to me do not know that
 my heart is full with your unspoken words.
 They who crowd in my path do not know that I am
 walking alone with you.
 They who love me do not know that their love
 brings you to my heart.

The poet lives and moves and has his being in the Lord. He has detached himself from the world and lives in continual nearness to the supreme One. This is the poet's transcendental God. But this God also controls the universe and is present in all objects.

“They have seen that the moving and unmoving
universe

Is flowing from joy in the shape of a stream of
joy ;

Every flame of fire trembles from fear
of thee.

Every breath of wind (is) by thy power.

Carrying out thy orders. Death day and night(is)

Seizing the moving and unmoving
things.

The mountain rises high at your beckoning.

The river runs in this direction and that, with
Thy music.

This is his immanent God. Both are the same.

In another poem the poet sings:—

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day
runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth
in numberless blades of grass and breaks with tumultuous waves
of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth
and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of
life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in
my blood this moment.

According to the *Upanishads*, "The Lord is the one reality, stable and eternal; stable because He is beyond time and space, eternal because He is ever in possession of all that was, is and will be.

"The world is a movement of the divine consciousness in space and time

"We thus see Brahman in all beings and things in the created universe as well as beyond it. It is individual, universal and transcendental. It is the continent and indwelling spirit of everything that we know of, small and great."¹

Though this realization comes to man sometimes in life, yet as a creature of flesh and blood engrossed in the various interests of worldly life, he is likely to forget his own soul and its kinship with the supreme spirit. Worldly success is apt to intoxicate a man and make him think that he is all in all. Tagore, therefore, attaches great spiritual value to sorrow. Sorrow is the great awakener. By defeating man's immediate worldly interests, by wrenching some petty gadgets from his hands as from the hands of a child, sorrow makes a man's soul turn upon itself and reflect and by introspection learn that there is something more abiding in him than these outside gadgets and that this abiding spirit in himself has an answering spirit in the universe more pervasive, which is the mainstay and support of our individual spirit.

But the poet's realization of the union of his soul with the divine spirit also comes through the channel of nature's beauty and profuseness. This is what he says :—

"The deliverance which comes through asceticism and renunciation, that is not mine.

"From inside the beauty of this world, through the affection of our dear ones, it is God who is drawing us towards

Him—No one else has the ability to so draw us towards him.”¹

From contemplation of the divine when Tagore turns to the service of his fellow-men, and reflects upon their condition, he finds they have lost hold of this eternal truth that ‘everything has its habitation in the Lord.’ That is why they have become weak and selfish and disunited and down-trodden.

The one barge which is the support of a million people,
Breaking it into parts, how shall we cross the ocean?²

Having found the ultimate spiritual support of this universe, he bases all his actions, even patriotic actions, on it. The courage and fortitude he offers is such that nothing can defeat it, nothing can dishearten it.

After Naivedya begins a period during which the poet passes through the worst grief, the worst calamity. His wife died in 1902 and the poet gave expression to his grief in the poems called Smarana. There are passages in Shelley’s Adonis which are full of alofty vision of the Infinite. But in Tagore’s Smarana (Remembrances) grief, and the sweetness of love and the vision of God into whom His wife’s soul has passed, have been so beautifully fused together that the sweet-bitterness of grief is relieved by a sense of reunion. The very warmth of his wife’s presence in the core of his heart, is there.

In 1903 came the death of his daughter Renuka. He had taken her to the hills of Almora as she was suffering from T. B. While he was at Almora at the foot of the Himalayas, he was writing children’s poetry. The poems have the pathos of Smarana but they have more playfulness about them and a free scope is given to imagination. They are partly for the

entertainment of children, partly to relieve his own heart of its recurring sorrow and help him forget himself in an atmosphere of childish activity that keeps him from the serious world of the grown-ups.

Plaything,

‘Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust,
playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of
a broken twig.’

‘I am busy with my accounts, adding up
figures by the hour.

Perhaps you glance at me and think, ‘What a
stupid, game to spoil your morning with.’

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed
in sticks and mud-pies.

I seek out costly playthings, and gather
lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find you create
your glad games. I spend both my time
and my strength over things I can never
obtain.

In my frail canoe I struggle to
cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too
am playing a game,

The poet says that there is no more meaning in the business of the grown-ups than in the play of children. But while the children can clothe the most trifling object with beauty and find satisfaction in it, the grownups wear their heart out in hankering after those things which they regard valuable, but which are more useless than children’s playthings in bringing real spiritual satisfaction to man.

Sisu or Crescent Moon is only a phase to divert his distressed mind. From *Sisu* he passes on to *Utsarga* (offering) a set of poems dedicated to the worship of the Lord. They are in the same key as those of the *Naivedya*; only they are less positive and more dedicative. The poet is seeking for his God again; only his God has now become more personal. The need for God, for a companion who will comfort his corroded soul, is more acute now than ever before.

I want to tie you up from moment to moment
in the thread of a narrative,

For all time, in the tunes of a song
I want to keep you contained.

Of golden measure, I have cast a net
I have filled sweet sound in the flute.

still doubt arises - have you been caught ?

No, us you are free you do what you desire
You ahede my grasp, but you tempt away my mind,
And whether I recognize you or not, my life is stirred
with a thrill.¹

The quest has begun again, the quest for God.

Becoming mad,

By my own fragrance
I roam in the forest
Like the musk-deer.

In the night of Falgun (March), when south wind blows

I do not find the path any where,

Whatever I desire, I desire wrongly,

Whatever I get, is not what desire.²

Like the fragrance of the musk-deer, the sweetness of the soul

is in the poet himself. But deluded, he goes about in search of it in the outside world. He runs after distant objects, thinking that this sweetness is in them but on approaching he finds that it is not there. He wanders about in this world lured by every illusion.

Emotion wants to be incarnate in form,

form seeks for force in emotion.

The limitless wants the familiar garb of the limited

The finite wants to be lost in the infinite

In creation and destruction. I do not know

whose doing it is,

There is ceaseless going and coming

from emotion to form, form to emotion

Bondage goes about seeking liberty

And liberty asks for shelter in bondage.'

This is groping towards the infinite again.

The formless expresses itself in form and form melts into the formless. And thus the game of the visible and the invisible goes on.

The next collection of poems is *Kheya* (Ferry). *Kheya* is a crossing over in a ferry boat to the other side, from this world into the other.

Prof. Thompson has described the atmosphere of *Kheya* as vaguely exasperating to a robust reader. Tagore was in anything but a robust frame of mind at this time. In spite of his abiding faith in life and in God, such was the condition of his mind, consequent on his many bereavements, that the world lost all charm in his eyes for a time and he wanted to go into some nook of retirement. It is his faith in God

that saves him, that makes him think of going to the other shore and finding consolation with Him alone. There is a tone of detachment, a touch of otherworldliness, in these poems. But after this period of twilight, during which his soul suffers acute pain which he wants to relieve by running away from this scene of suffering, hope and cheerfulness again return to the poet.

It is significant that the time of *Kheya* (embarking on the ferry boat) is the time of evening twilight when the earth is darkening and the business and cares of the day come to an end.

But after this twilight and the dreadful night, the dawn comes.

Blessed, the morning sun.

O accept my salutation

Blessed is the sweet breeze

I bow to you again and again

O bird of the morning

By your keen and clear voice

Taking up my salutation,

Spread it over the distant heavens

Blessed the dust of the earth

Blessed is the fair of the living in this
world.

Bowing my head to the dust

Blessed am I at this time of the
morning.

Cheerfulness and joy in life and in the things of this earth, have returned to the poet. He bows to these in humility, realizing their grandeur. And now this humility becomes

profound. With this fresh access of faith and joy tempered by a deep humility born of the realization of how trivial and sad human life can be without faith in God and the spiritual support that this faith gives, begins his fourth period, the period of the *Gitanjali*. The difference to me in the poems of the *Gitanjali* and those of the *Naivedya* is this difference of humility. This humility marks the poems of the *Gitanjali* with the fervour of a devotee to reach his God, to be constantly in His presence and not to lose touch with Him. The fear of even temporarily losing touch with Him is there and hence the solicitation, the tone of earnest entreaty. There is more of a self-confidence about *Naivedya*. The faith that God is always with him (poet) is undisturbed. But the *Gitanjali* poems are marked, as by the yearning of a lover for his beloved, where the beloved can play the game of fast and loose and where the weaker party, he whose love is deeper and who cannot do without the presence of the other is somewhat in a state of suspense and torture. The *Gitanjali* poems are written in a tone of devotion though the other characteristics of Tagore's mysticism are there. They are marked by an earnestness of search for the supreme One, the spirit's only solace.

I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.

It was my part at this feast to play upon my instrument, and I have done all I could.

Now, I ask, has the time come at last when I may go in and see thy face and offer thee my silent salutation?

The poet has finished the business of his life and his sole occupation now is devotion to his God. It is a characteristic of mysticism of the devotional type, that it is marked by great earnestness and humility and the human personality is held as distinct and separate, yearning and striving for union with the divine personality.

17.

I am only waiting for love to give myself up
at last into his hands. That is why it is
so late and why I have been guilty of such
omission.

They come with their laws and their codes
to bind me fast ; but I evade them ever, for

I am only waiting for love to give
myself up at last into his hands.

People blame me and call me heedless ;

I doubt not they are right in their blame.

The market day is over and work is
all done for the busy. Those who came to
call me in vain have gone back in anger.

I am only waiting for love to give
myself up at last into his hands.

Rabindranath is a practical mystic. His mysticism is born of his own experience and is part of his life. He has had experience of various phases of mysticism. Though, therefore, his poetry here is devotional, he had not lost his love for the beauty of nature and the tenderness of human relationship.

23.

Art thou abroad on this stormy night, on
thy journey of love, my friend ? The sky groans
like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight. Ever and again
I open my door and look out on the darkness
my friend ?

I can see nothing before me. I wonder
where lies thy path ?

By what dim shore of the ink-black
river, by what far edge of the frowning
forest, through what mazy depth of gloom
art thou threading thy course to come to
me, my friend ?

There it first a salutation of the devotee to the Lord in the Gitanjali. In the next few poems the poet waits for a union with the divine spirit, like a beloved waiting for her lover. According to the poet, the commerce of the world is done, he has tasted of the world's joy and its beauty, and to the poet now what matters is union with God, All else is beside the point His life so far was only a haphazard preparation for this crowning end of life. His barge was gradually tending towards this final goal. The journey and its hazards had their charm but its goal was this union of the individual soul with the divine soul.

But how is the union to be won ? Not through grabbing, not through selfishness and pride. The worldly self must be completely obliterated and in the profound humility of sheer spirit, one must devote oneself to the realization of God. Then and then alone is this union possible.

28.

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when
I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want; but to hope for it
I feel ashamed.

I am certain that priceless wealth is i
thee and that thou are my best friend,
But I have not the heart to sweep away
the tinsel that fills my room.

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of
dust and death;

I hate it, yet hug it in my love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my
shame secret and heavy ;
yet when I come to ask for my good.

I quake in fear lest my
prayer be granted.

Though man wants to be free of earthly trammels and
interests and lead a life of selflessness and dedication, yet the
interests of life are so strong, and tempting, he shudders to
think he should be without them. Real freedom of the spirit
is not thus easy to attain for every man.

30.

I came out alone on my way to my tryst.
But who is this that follows me in the
silent dark?

I move aside to avoid his presence
but I escape him not.

He makes the dust rise from the earth
with his swagger ; he adds his loud voice
to every word I utter.

He is my own little self, my lord, he
knows no shame; but I am ashamed to
come to thy door in his company. ,

Man tries to be immersed in the contemplation of God. But this spirit is dogged by his worldly self at every step.

The poems in the Gitanjali follow this order. First there is the salutation to the Lord, then a passionate yearning to meet Him, then the obstacles put in the way of God-realization by our own selfish appetites, then the intimation of His presence or his coming, through the song of birds, the first sight of dawn, the fragrant breeze and even the violent storm. His presence can be felt either by direct contemplation of the divine or through the many sights and sounds of this beautiful universe.

47.

"The night is nearly spent waiting for him in vain. I fear lest in the morning he suddenly come to my door when I have fallen asleep wearied out. Oh friends, leave the way open to him—forbid him not.

If the sound of his steps does not wake me do not try to rouse me, I pray. I wish not to be called from my sleep by the clamorous choir of birds, by the riot of wind at the festival of morning light. Let me sleep undisturbed even if my lord comes of a sudden to my door.

Ah, my sleep, precious sleep, which only waits for his touch to vanish, Ah, my closed eyes that would open their lids only to the light of his smile when he stands before me like a dream emerging from darkness of sleep.

Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul let it come from his glance.

And let my return to myself be immediate
return to him.

This is waiting for God, direct contemplation, and direct realization of Him. But there is also His realization through the objects created by Him. This is pantheism.

45.

Have you not heard his silent steps?¹

And from this manifestation of the Lord through natural objects we come to the presence of His spirit in man. Every human being has an element of this divine. To neglect men and devote oneself to the abstract contemplation of a vague notion of the divine is absurd. God is present in every man. If one is a believer in God, one must devote oneself to the service of his fellowmen. Exclusive devotion to the abstract may lead to barrenness; just as too much addiction to what is expressed in beautiful colour and form might degrade one into sheer love of pleasure.

11.

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads.
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple
with doors all shut. Open thine eyes and see thy God is not
before thee.

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and
where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun
and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy
holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil.

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found?
Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of
creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditation and leave aside thy flowers
and incense. What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered
and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of
thy brow.

And again :—

59.

Yes I know this is nothing but thy love,
O beloved of my heart—this golden light that
dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing
across the sky, this passing breeze leaving
its coolness upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes—
this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is
bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes,
and my heart has touched thy feet.

It is enough to quote some of these poems, to understand
their meaning.

63.

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not.
Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast
brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave
my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the
old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others
wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the
one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my
heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none,
then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may
never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play
of the many.

Since God is present everywhere, in all persons and all
things, everything is holy and divine and deserving of our wor-

ship. But we must not be lost too much in the outward things and the sweetness of human relationship to forget Him-the one God whose manifestations these are.

66

She who ever had remained in the depth of my
being, in the twilight of gleams and of
glimpses, she who never opened her veils
in the morning light, will be my last gift to thee, my God,
folded in my filial song.

Words have wooed yet failed to win her ;
persuasion has stretched to her its eager arms in vain.
I have roamed from country to country keeping her in the
core of my heart; and around her have risen and fallen the growth
and decay of my life.

Over my thoughts and actions, my slumbers and dreams,
she reigned yet dwelt alone and apart.

Many a man knocked at my door and asked for her and
turned away in despair.

There was none in the world who ever saw her face to
face, and she remained in her loneliness waiting for thy
recognition,

This is a beautiful description of the soul or psyche.
Hidden deep in the core of man's being, she is waiting to be
recognised, and received into its arms by the divine spirit.

Then comes the sorrow of separation.

79.

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life
then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight-let me
not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this
sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

The spirit of man and the life of things are always yearning to be at one with the divine spirit and life infinite. Man is ignorant of the object of this yearning, yet it does not fail to produce its pain. And this pain of separation is universal. It is born of the urge in man and things to find their fulfilment in union with the infinite. This pain is, therefore, a precious spiritual possession of man.

84.

It is the pang of separation that spreads
 throughout the world and gives birth to shapes
 innumerable in the infinite sky.
 It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence
 all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling
 leaves in rainy darkness of July.
 It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves
 and desires, into sufferings and joys in human homes ; and
 this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through
 my poet's heart.

Then comes death, the final goodbye to this beautiful visible universe. a last lingering look at it, and the final meeting with the Lord, the Infinite Formless.

91.

O thou last fulfilment of life, death, my death,
 come and whisper to me.
 Day after day have, I kept watch for thee, for thee have
 I borne the joys and pangs of life.
 All that I am, that I have that I hope and all my love,
 have ever flowed towards thee in depth of secrecy. One final
 glance from thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own.

The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night.

The body is laid to rest and the soul meets her divine lord in the solitude of the night of the formless Infinite. But what a parting salutation and tribute to the world of form (the visible infinite) before passing out into the formless.

96.

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed - let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come - let this be my parting word.

Call it philosophy, call it religion, call it poetry. But here is worship of the divine from the first salutation of the approach to the last farewell of departure. The songs of the Gitanjali roughly follow this scheme. The approach is to the lord of the visible world, the departure is into the lord who is invisible. Both are the same. But man being a creature of this earth is subject to life and death. Yet there is that in him which is immortal and it is by means of this immortal principle in him that he is able to see the infinite both in the world of forms and the world of the formless.

And last comes the final salutation :—

103.

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses
spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation
to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single
current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their
mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home
in one salutation to thee.

PART III

Conclusion

In this book an attempt has been made to trace the continuity of development of the spirit of Rabindranath. Beginning with the Juvenalia which are sometimes mere imitation, sometimes exercises in versification and music, he gradually discovers himself and in the Evening Songs he first finds his genius. From the Evening Songs where his spirit is stifled, disconsolate for want of direction, he gradually proceeds through the Morning Songs and Pictures and Songs to its unfoldment. The development of his genius goes on apace through the various experiences of life which are incidental to the successive stages of a man's growth, so that while his poetry, on the one hand, reflects the growing mind of the author, it is throughout leavened, on the other, by the mysticism peculiar to his nature.

This mysticism in the author is a practical experience, and it unfolds as his mind develops, from stage to stage. His very first vision at the age of twenty-one, in Calcutta reveals to him that this physical world is a unity, a continuity, a flow which is limitless and unending. His senses, his consciousness, are lost in it for a time, and though the vision fades away, its memory and the sense of the oneness of human existence with it, remains and sustains him through periods of comparative darkness, when he is more preoccupied with worldly concerns. This memory and this vision must have also been fed by his

habit of contemplation, his study of ancient Indian scriptures and his surroundings which were full of a spiritual and artistic atmosphere.

This initial vision naturally leads to two things ; first, the belief that life can never suffer destruction, that even death is only a change and that in this universe nothing is lost. This realization did not come to him through a study of the physical sciences but as a living, palpable experience. Death, therefore, and the fear of complete annihilation which have struck the greatest terror to the spirit of man, through all ages, completely lose their sting. There is therefore no genuine sorrow in his poetry. The sorrow is only temporary and much of the sorrow is like that of a loving person who cannot bear even the least separation from his beloved, or the least little forgetfulness of her.

Sorrow is either caused by the denial of satisfaction of some physical appetite which we in our ignorance regard as one of the sources of happiness or by separation from some dear one: The poet says of the one :—

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever
didst thou save me by hard refusals.....,

All denial of satisfaction of worldly pleasures brings us nearer to God. How can his poetry dealing with this phase thus be called by any stretch, poetry of sorrow? The nearness to God and the final hope of meeting Him, give it a peculiar undertone of optimism. And besides, the vast mass of Tagore's poetry is all full of direct joy, the enjoyment of the sights and sounds of this earth, and the beauty and tenderness of human relationship, through which the spirit of God is always

trying to attract us to itself. Thus all worldly commerce to him becomes spiritualised. No room is left for greed or selfishness or narrow grabbing. All earthly dealings are ultimately dealings with Him and the perpetual consciousness of this fills the mind with a feeling of divine bliss.

Secondly, sorrow in poetry, is a result of separation from those we love. And since in the poet's view the dead are received into His bosom by the Lord and since they are waiting there to be reunited with us, the sorrow changes into sweet remembrance and love and joyful longing and ultimate certainty of union. Only physically they have disappeared from our world, but since the poet is daily in communion with God, he feels the presence of these departed souls quite near him, even in his own heart. The comfort of this is, indeed, great. The sorrow changes into spiritual contentment and even in joy.

The second point of this treatise is that there is no consciousness of sin and the resultant desolation and despair of spirit of which Dr. Faustus is a classical example. From the very beginning Rauindranath's poetry sings of the oneness of the universe and the immortality of the spirit. The bright green blades of grass breaking out of the silent earth are an intimation of His coming. The lover standing under the shade of the tree and hearkening to the tinkling of the anklets on his beloved's feet, or listening to the ripple of the silver laughter of his lady and her companions, probably at their noticing his secret and silent presence, are an echo of the music that is in the universe. And the ultimate destiny of man is to be united with God. God is always waiting for the spirit of man to recog-

nise His presence and come to Him. Sin is born of selfishness, of narrow egoism, which gives rise to greed, lust, hate, murder. All Rabindranath's poetry is instinct with a deep vision of the oneness and reality of this universe. Though the depth of this vision increases with the passing of time, the vision is all the time there. The moment one takes up Tagore's poetry and reads it, one is captivated by it and is absorbed by this vision so that even after the poetry has been laid aside, the vision persists, the soul is converted and its whole outlook on life, changes. There remains only one desire, one dominant passion and that is to feel the soul's unity with the divine spirit. Heaven is thus transported to this living earth and there is no hell. One does not even dream of what sin is.

Thirdly, an attempt had been made to trace the growth of mysticism in Tagore and its different stages. Tagore was a mystic. A mystic is born and not made. Mysticism is temperamental. According to Prof. Das Gupta and others, the mystic temperament shows certain physical dreaminess, and constitutional qualities, like a certain phlegmatism, want of interest in the ordinary useful things of life and a certain intense devotion to matters which appear idle and useless in the eyes of this world. Tagore's want of interest in his school and his routine studies, his absence of desire for worldly progress and promotion, show this. His lonely wanderings in his own garden, and his deep interest as a boy in his own musings in solitude and such other things, are a further evidence of this.

According to Evelyn Underhill, the mystic perception is aroused by religion, pain and, beauty. It is fortunate that in Tagore his first mystic vision comes not in any theological context but in the most common surroundings. It is a result of intensified sensibilities and an inner spiritual dissatisfaction and craving. The first vision reveals to him the world as a deep limitless ocean flowing with life. All life, even his own, become one continuous flow, tossing up and down like waves. A stream of joy wells up in the poet's heart at this discovery, joy which comes with the realization that there is no end to life, no death, and that all life is one and limitless. This vision continues to buoy him up for some time but gradually it recedes and the poet is drawn into the interests and cares of life.

His second vision comes to him at Sealdah where he is busy managing his father's estates. This seems to be a result partly of introspection to which he must have been given and of the realization of the futility of mere worldly satisfaction. What the poet discovers is a deeper principle of life which not only embraces his own present life but goes back into the limitless past and runs into the future. The scientific atmosphere of his age makes him trace all its ramifications. He does not, like the ancient mystics, see it in the shape of a deity. But the poetic and devotional side of his nature make him call it by the name of Jivan devata. The vision of this new reality which is discovered by him is absolutely true ; only the name given to it and the limitations attached to it, may not be very exact. Then comes a period of poetic

activity again in which the poet sings of nature and human relationship and of love.

His third period comes with his settling down at Shantiniketan. Disillusioned by the rebuff he receives from his compatriots, he decides to dedicate his life to God and the disinterested service of his motherland. His chief inspiration at this time are the *Upanishads* and, constant contemplation of their truth leads him to a new realisation of the presence of the Supreme spirit. The poems of this period are contained in the *Naivedya*. Henceforward the deep spiritual and religious tone that his poetry takes on, is never lost. His mystic vision at this time seems to be at the stage of illumination. He has all along kept himself under discipline. Though it may not amount to leading an ascetic life and a life of mortification, it has yet been a life such as the ancient *Rishis* led, attending to their daily duties and never forgetting that they live and move and have their being in the Lord. In the poems of the *Naivedya*, his position is that of a person having a rightful place in this universe which is the habitation of the Lord. He feels the pride and joy and privilege of it.

But in the *Gitanjali*, his attitude is marked by a deep craving and utter humility. This may be called his fourth stage. The poet has passed through a period of excruciating pain, and the suffering of bereavement. His need for, and his dedication to, God become personal. He is now in the position of a seeker, a lover, a devotee, in quest of his Lord, his Beloved, his God. And the craving is insistent. He won't stop until

his search is complete. His religious meditation has gone on all the time. The inspiration of the *upanishads* is there all through. But the suffering and beleavement of the intervening period lend to the poems of the *Gitanjali* a deeply personal, an intensely devotional tone, all its own ; a tone marked by utter humility of spirit and passionate importunity and supreme eagerness to meet his God.

Again, Ravindranath's mystic outlook is not that of a theorist, but is an actual practical outlook. It is born of his own experience and part and parcel of his life. It has come to him in stages, through a joyous mood unclouded by narrow selfishness, through disillusionment about mere worldly things, through the suffering and travail of his spirit, through detachment from worldly interests. He sees the world bathed in a new light and feels its glory and its joy and its deep spiritual nature. It is this experience of the world revealed to him in a new light that he has rendered into poetry. As his vision deepens and crystalises, he sees the underlying essence of it all, God, who is the inner spirit of all this creation ; and this world which is His manifestation, and its beautiful sights and sounds, as intimations of His presence.

These phases of illumination may roughly be compared to the phases of illumination in the life of a recognised mystic, Jacob Boehme. To quote from Elelyn Underhill's book on mysticism :—

“In Boehme's life, as described in the introduction to the English translation of his collected works, there were three

distinct onsets of illumination ; all of the pantheistic and external type. In the first, which seems to have happened while he was very young, we are told that "he was surrounded by a divine light for seven days, and stood in the highest contemplation and kingdom of joy. This we may perhaps identify with mystical awakening of the kind experienced by Suso. About the year 1600 occurred the second illumination, initiated by a trancelike state of consciousness, the result of gazing at a polished disc This experience brought with it that peculiar and lucid vision of the inner reality of the phenomenal world in which as he says, he looked into the deepest foundation of things.

"In the unfolding of these mysteries before his understanding, he had a great measure of joy, yet returned home and took care of his family and lived in great peace and silence, scarce intimating to any these wonderful things that had befallen him.

"So far as we can tell from his own scattered statements from this time onwards Boehme must have enjoyed a frequent and growing consciousness of the transcendental world ; though there is evidence that he like all other mystics, knew seasons of darkness "many a shrewd Repulse" ———. In 1610-perhaps as the result of such intermittent struggles, the vivid illumination of ten years before was repeated in an enhanced form

A similar process appears to have gone on in the life of Rabinranath. The difference is that Ravindranath has re-

A similar process appears to have gone on in the life of Rabindranath. The difference is that Rabindranath has recorded only his first experience of illumination in his Reminiscences. His other experiences of illumination do not seem to be separately recorded, but find expression in his poetry and essays. But the illumination persisted and deepened and intensified, till it came to be the central point of his being.

The first phase of his vision, illustrated in the Morning songs is pantheistic. The second phase that of the 'Jiwandevata' is some kind of realization of the immanence of the Deity. And his third which persists and develops into his fourth is the transcendence of God. Yet in his poetry of this period, the vision of pantheism and immanence both mix into his realization of the transcendence of God. So that he makes use of all kinds of metaphor and illustration. He is more a poet than a religious man from the very beginning, but the visions and realizations that come to him reveal the Presence of an All-Pervading Deity, of which the inner self or Soul of ours is a part. All the love, the Beauty and strength that are in life, emanate from this Supreme Deity and therefore, He should be the object of all our worship, of love, and Beauty, and strength. Rabindranath's realization of this is a gradual development which he reaches after a good deal of travail, and through the experiences of life. Nourished on the truths of the Upanishads which had been the basis of his Brahmo creed, and given to meditation, the visions of Reality which came to Tagore sometimes at odd moments and unfolding secretly and gradually through the depths of his being, were his own. They were a part and parcel of his experience and take colour from his personality and environment.



A double process appears to have gone on in the life of Rabindranath. The difference between his first conception of illumination in his literary career. His other experience of illumination do not seem to be so easily recorded, but that expression in his poetry and essays, but the illumination, varied and deepened, and increased, all the time as he the central point of his life.

The first phase of his vision, illuminated in the literature was a spiritual. The second phase of the illumination was a part of realization of the language of the world. And his third vision came and brought him his own personal experience of God. Yet in his poetry of this period, the vision of perfection and human love both mix into his realization of the illumination of God. He that his makes out an all kind of metaphor and illustration. He is more a poet than a religious man from the very beginning, but the vision and realizations that come to him reveal the presence of a personal thing. He is himself or God or some other part. At the last, the beauty and strength that are in the human form, the human body and therefore, the whole in the aspect of all our struggle of love and beauty, and so forth. Rabindranath's realization of this is a gradual development which he reaches after a good deal of travail, and through his experience of life. Founded on the reality of the world which had been the basis of his earlier work, and given to realization, the vision of beauty which came to him, sometimes at odd moments and suddenly, slowly and gradually through the depths of his being, and in fact, they were a part and part of his experience and life came from the personality and environment.

NOTES

Page	No.	
3	1	translated from Bengali by the writer (of this book).
4	1	translated by the writer.
4	2	„
5	1	„
5	2	„
5	3	„
6	1	„
7	1	„
8	1	„
9	1	„
9	2	„
10	1	„
10	2	„
13	1	from Prof. Thompson's book 'Tagore.'
14	1	„
15	1	translated by the writer.
16	1	„
16	2	„
16	3	„
17	1	„
18	1	„
18	2	„
19	1	„
22	1	from Prof. Thompson's 'Tagore.'
23	1	„
24	1	Translated by the writer.
28	1	from the Gardener-2.

Page	No.	
29	1	Translated by the writer from Bengali Gitanjali, Song 33
29	2	Translated by the writer from Naivedia, Song 2.
30	1	Translated by the writer.
31	1	„
31	2	„
31	3	„
31	4	from the translation by Shri C. C. Dutt, in Shri Arvindo Mandir, 2nd Annual Jayanti Number.
31	5	„
32	1	„
34	1	Translated by the writer from Smarana.
34	2	„
34	3	„
35	1	„
38	1	Translated by the writer.
39	1	„
39	2	„
40	1	„
43	1	„
44	1	„
45	1	The number 45 is the number of the Song in the English Gitanjali.
46	1	Song 45, in the English Gitanjali.
48	1	Song no. 13 in English Gitanjali.
48	2	„ 18 „
49	1	„ 19 „
		(The numbers at the top of these poems are no's of the Songs in the English Gitanjali.
57	1	Gardener 28.
63	2	Didima's means Grandmother's

Page	No.	
63	3	Cremation ground in Calcutta.
64	1	Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore.
64	4	Poet's Reminiscences pp 221-22;
65	1	<i>Ibid.</i>
73	1	Rabindranath by Ajit Kumar Chakraverty p. 45.
73	2	<i>Ibid</i> p. 46. Translated by writer.
77	2	from Ravindra Rachanavali Vol. IV, translated by writer.
82	2	Gardener 18.
85	1	The first verse of <i>Isopanishad</i> , meaning 'all this is for habitation by the Lord.'
88	1	Isopanishad translated by C. C. Dutt : See note p. 31, line 4 above.
89	1	from Ravindra Rachanavali Vol. VIII, translated from Bengali by writer.
89	2	Naivedya—46 ; translated by writer.
91	1	Utsarga Song 9 ; translated by writer.
92	2	from Utsarga translated by writer,
99	1	English Gitanjali 45.

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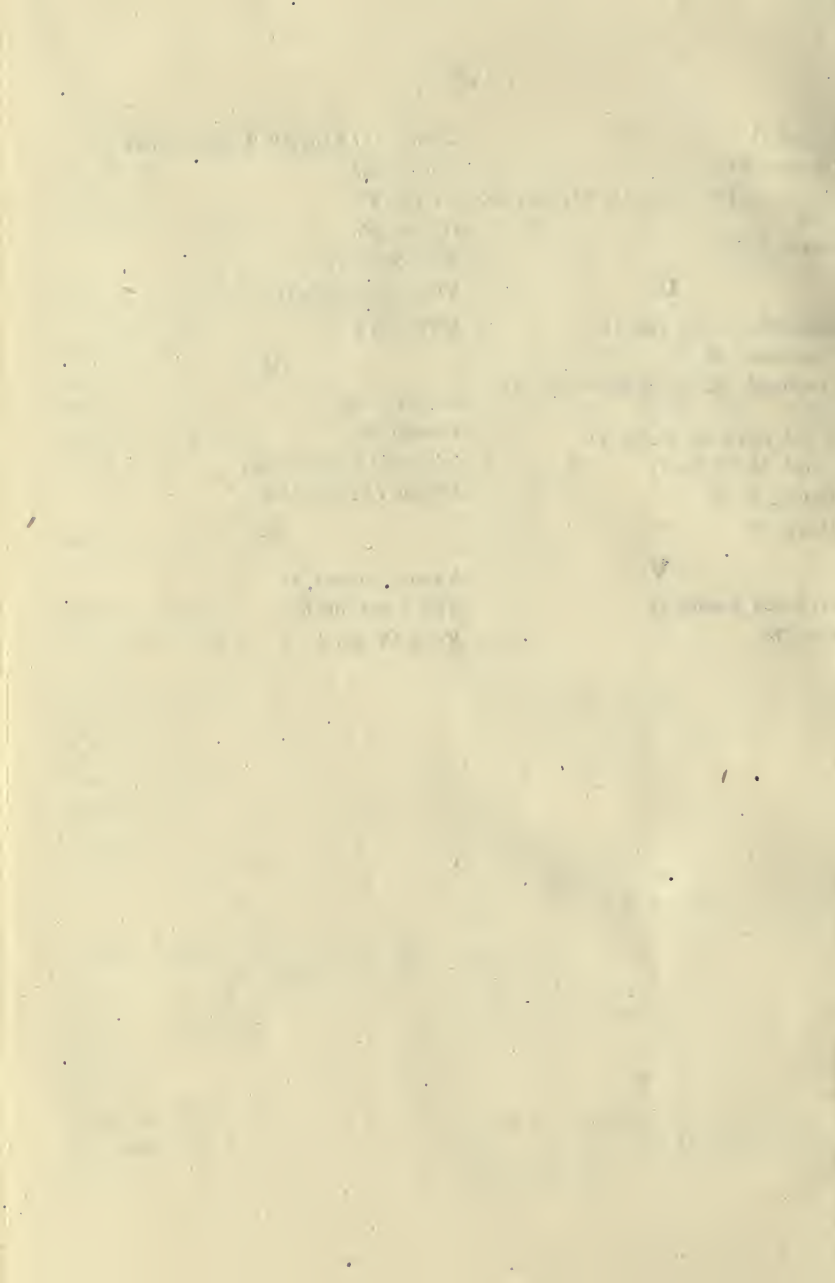
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